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THREE THEORIES OF A CRIME.

Related by the detective who worked up the clues, and the attorney for the defense, with the prisoner's statement as copied from the record of the court stenographer—The network of incriminating facts that confronted a popular young physician with a tragic fate.

(Complete in This Issue.)

CHAPTER I.—THE SEARCH FOR CLUES.

SINCE the case of Bella Seaford, as she had temporarily styled herself, has excited world wide interest, and a complete history of the affair, so far as known, from beginning to end, is to be given to the public in book form, I deem it my duty to narrate the facts exactly as they came before me at the time without coloring my narrative in any way by the introduction of later information, which might or might not have altered my first impressions of the guilt or innocence of the man accused of the murder.

It is needless for me to state that, as an old detective, scenes of murder, and other manner of violent death, were not new to me. I must confess, however, that never in the whole course of my life did a crime appear to me so strangely cruel, so brutally atrocious, as the taking off of Bella Seaford.

When I entered the building in which the body was discovered, a large crowd had collected in the hallways, held at bay by two policemen, whose duty it was to see that no one disturbed the position of the body or the arrangement of the furniture until the proper officers had discharged their various duties in the premises. My first glance at the inanimate form upon the floor near the window of room 47 awakened every tender feeling in my heart. The girl was beautiful as a Venus, even in death. She had on a light gown of some flimsy material, and cold and rigid though she lay, every curve of her queenly figure was disposed to the greatest advantage. One white arm, full and round as sculptured marble, was twisted back beneath her head, not in a death agony, but apparently in repose. Her hair, long and luxurious, had evidently been unbound before her death, and clung about her neck and shoulders in dark, rippling waves, which threw into still stronger contrast the now pallid beauty of the loveliest face my eyes had ever beheld.

No artist could have more strikingly posed her, and it occurred to me at

a glance that her grace and beauty had been her undoing, for surely nothing but the madness of jealousy or the frenzy of unrequited love could prompt the murder of so divine a creature.

I placed my hand upon the body. It was cold.

"She has been dead for some hours," remarked the coroner, in answer to my inquiring look. "I should judge that the murder was committed some time last night."

I looked at my watch. It was nine o'clock in the evening. Nine o'clock the previous night would set it back twenty four hours. I must have looked incredulous, for he bent over the corpse, and taking hold of one dainty hand, lifted it slightly, allowing it to spring back again, to prove that the muscles were set and rigid. Then he pointed to the blood upon the floor, which had assumed a dull color and coagulated appearance.

After the coroner had removed the body to the morgue, I was free to pursue my investigations in quiet. I closed and locked the door, and sitting down upon a chair reviewed the situation.

I had already ascertained her name from the other tenants of the building. Little was known of her there. She had occupied the room but a little over a week, and none of her fellow tenants had formed her acquaintance, although all who had seen her in life remarked upon her wondrous beauty.

I glanced keenly around the room. It was a small one, not more than twelve by eighteen at its widest part. The bed was undisturbed, proving that the murder had been committed before her usual time for retiring. She had been shot through the heart, and the blood, which had been to some extent absorbed by her garments, still left quite a pool upon the floor.

It usually results to my advantage to sit and think a while in such cases, and this one was no exception. Before sitting down, I had lighted an extra gas jet which I had noticed upon the wall beside the dresser, and the side light cast by that upon the pool of coagulated blood before me gave me the first real clue in a case which, up to that moment, had been shrouded in the deepest mystery.

Glancing down meditatively, it seemed to me that I could trace the shape of a hand in the hardening mass before me. In an instant my senses all sprang into acute action. I bent intently over it. Yes, there were the fingers, the palm, and the thumb. The position of the hand was evidently downward.

The discovery set my pulses tingling with excitement. The jet was on the wrong side. I turned the gas off, and struck a match on the farther side. The marks seemed more distinct. There were little dots where the fingers had lain, and the blood had congealed on either side, perfectly outlining the imprint of a hand. It was a man's hand, too, for the dainty little one of the murdered girl could never have left that large impression.

I lighted the gas again, and with the additional light of my matches I carefully studied every atom of the pool, until I was certain there were no other marks. Then taking my knife, I cut out that portion of the carpet bearing the imprint, and locking the door behind me, safely carried my clue to headquarters, and deposited it in my locker. It had already hardened

sufficiently to bear this transportation, and I hoped that by the following morning it would be so incrustated that it would submit, without danger of disintegration, to a more minute examination.

The possibility of a clue in that indistinct imprint of a hand seemed to me, upon due reflection, so utterly remote that I hesitated about informing my chief of the circumstance, which fact accounts for the following meager outline of the case entered in the secret blotter of the department :

Bella Seaford, aged about twenty two. Brunette. Beauty above the average. Found dead in room 47, Baxter Building, 8.30 P.M., October 4th, 188—. Bullet hole through heart. Body discovered by Charles Nolan, janitor of building. Supposed to have been a trained nurse. Crime evidently occurred previous night. No marks of identity on the clothing. No letters or other indications of her home or history found in her effects. Jewels and valuables untouched. Position of body, and the fact that no weapon was found, indicate murder.

JOHN BRIGHT, DETECTIVE.

That was my busy night. By diligent inquiry I ascertained that the woman had represented herself as a stranger in the city, upon applying for a room at the Baxter Building. I visited the janitor.

"Nolan," I inquired, "when did you first see her?"

"The first day she came, Mr. Bright. That was a week ago last Tuesday."

"Did you talk with her?"

"Not much."

"What did she talk about? Describe your first meeting with her."

"Well, first she said that she was in the habit of taking care of her own room, and that she would not want my wife to look after it."

"You had already proffered your wife's services?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. We always do."

"Was that all the conversation?"

"That was all at the time, sir. The next day she inquired the way to the Samaritan Hospital, and I directed her."

"Did she give any reason for going there?"

"Yes, she said she was a trained nurse in search of a position."

"Did she at any time mention where she was from?"

"No, sir."

"Have you any idea whatever where she came from?"

"No, but I judge she was from some small city, as my wife had to explain to her about the mail chute. She had never seen one before."

"Why did she wish to know?" I asked. "Did she mail a letter?"

"Yes."

"Did you see it?"

"No, but my wife might have."

I found Mrs. Nolan. With a woman's curiosity she knew something at least of the letter.

"Certainly, Mr. Bright. I will cheerfully give you all the information at my command. A letter? Yes, she mailed a letter. It was—let me see—it was Wednesday morning. She inquired of me on the stairs the direction to the nearest mail box. I told her about the mail chute, and showed her

how to put her letter in. I was going to take it from her, but she drew back so suspiciously that I tried my best to get a peep at the address."

"Well?" I interrogated, as she made a slight pause.

"I was just trying to recall what I saw. Her thumb was over a portion of the address and I failed to get it, but if I remember aright, the first name was Henry and the last one began with a capital T."

"Was it a city letter?"

"I can't tell you, sir. You see she was too quick for me."

That was the very best that I could do. Little enough to begin an inquiry upon, I am sure. I did not sleep at all that night. After exhausting every possible source of inquiry, I sat down to think it over, and the gray dawn of the morning found me as far away from a key to the mystery as ever.

There was one chance open to me. I could obtain no information at the Samaritan Hospital that night, on account of the absence of the chief physician. I based all my hopes upon the possibility that she might have applied there for employment, and might have given references to some hospital in which she had been previously employed.

CHAPTER II.—AN UNLOOKED-FOR DISCOVERY.

My first visit next morning was to the locker in which I had deposited the piece of carpet. I carefully lifted it out and placed it on my desk near the window. There was no mistake about it. It was surely the imprint of a man's hand. The broad sunlight brought out many of the outlines, indiscernible in the artificial light of the evening before. While I was at work upon it the chief came in.

"What have you there, Bright?" he asked.

I explained the circumstances.

"Well," he remarked, after hearing me through, "it may or may not become a clue. Might not some of the men taking out the body have caused it?"

"No, I am certain it did not occur in that way. You can see, by the incrustations about the outline of the fingers, that the hand must have been pressed there when the blood was fresh, and before it began to congeal."

Chief Donlan turned a small magnifying glass upon the piece of carpet.

"You are right," he replied, "and there is another point about it which enhances its value as a clue. The hand that made that impress was minus either the whole or the first joint of the middle finger."

I took the glass and examined the impression. The middle finger was missing, sure enough. This was at least one tangible clue upon which to work. The murderer then had either a stub or no middle finger at all on his left hand. The next thing to be done was to find out who the woman's acquaintances were in the city, always with an eye to locating the man with the crippled hand.

I went direct to the Samaritan Hospital and inquired for the physician in chief, Dr. Throck.

He was alone in his office, and I promptly stated the object of my visit.

Dr. Throck was a large, handsome young man, smooth shaven, with a classic cut of features and large, intelligent blue eyes. He seemed strangely nervous when I opened the subject of the murder to him, although I took it for granted that the matter could not be entirely new to him, as the papers had devoted the usual space to all manner of sensational stories regarding it.

"I can tell you nothing at all about her, Mr. Bright," he said after a slight pause, during which he seemed to be reflecting, as if endeavoring to recall the circumstances of the woman's supposed visit. "We have many applications here from women who graduate as trained nurses, and I confess that I am unable to remember this particular one." *

I was not at all satisfied with the doctor's answer. It was usual for us to receive all the assistance possible from heads of public institutions in cases of this character, and I took umbrage immediately at the doctor's apparent disinclination to further the ends of justice to that extent.

"But do you not keep a record of all applications of this kind?" I asked a little sharply, for I had gone to him for information and expected him to manifest a desire at least to accord it.

"Certainly," he replied with more affability than he had yet evinced. "Jones!" he called through the half open door of his private office.

The clerk entered.

"Jones," said the doctor, "bring me your application list."

The book was brought, and Jones stood by while Dr. Throck turned with apparent interest to the more recent entries.

"There is no one here by the name of Bella Seaford," he remarked simply.

But I would not be baffled so easily.

"Is it not possible," I asked, "that if she had an enemy she may have registered under some other name? Jones," I asked suddenly, thinking to elicit some information from the clerk, "do you remember the appearance of the women who have called here within the past ten days?"

"I think I do, sir."

Before Jones could go any further the doctor peremptorily gave him an order which would take him into the hospital wards, but I interposed an objection. Something about the doctor's manner during the inquiry nettled me sorely.

"Look you here, Dr. Throck," I exclaimed with considerable emphasis, "I came here for certain information in a case of murder, and I want you to manifest a desire, at least, to give it to me, or I'll find a way myself to obtain it."

He looked troubled for an instant, then he smiled pleasantly as he replied:

"I want you to feel assured, Mr. Bright, that everything we can do to help you will be done. I merely thought the presence of Jones unnecessary, as I personally meet all applicants, and"—with another very pleasant smile, which made me feel ashamed of myself for my hasty words—"my memory is always reliable."

"Very well," I answered, considerably mollified. "But if you will pardon me for saying so, we frequently find that two heads are better than one, so if there is no objection, I should prefer to have Jones remain."

I took the book in my own hands.

"Now, doctor," I began, "here is Julia Mason, registered on the first of October. What was she like?"

The doctor read from the book over my shoulder. "Thirty years of age. Brunette. Experienced in"—etc., etc.

"Does that coincide with your recollection of her?" I asked of Jones.

"Perfectly," he replied.

"Here is Martha Preston, on the 28th of September," I continued.

As in the previous case, the doctor read her description from the book, as it had been registered by Jones, and Jones himself vouched for its accuracy.

I made a mental calculation as to the possible time of Miss Seaford's application, if made, and found that, as the third from the last application was registered under the date of September 15th, it could not possibly have been she. But I was not yet willing to give up.

"Jones," I said, addressing myself to the clerk, "Bella Seaford, who was found murdered last night, inquired of the janitor of the Baxter Building, a week ago last Wednesday, the way to this hospital, stating that she was a trained nurse. Now does it ever happen that women apply here and neglect to register?"

Dr. Throck had seated himself as I began to direct my question to Jones.

"I do not recall any such case very recently, sir. Certainly not in the past month."

I had one more card to play, for I did not wish to leave a stone unturned. I drew the morning paper from my pocket, containing a very poor picture of the murdered girl.

"I want you to study that, Jones," I said, "and say if you have any remembrance of any person answering anywhere near that likeness."

Before he could reply or take the paper into his own hands, Dr. Throck grasped it with more interest than he had yet displayed.

"No," he declared, and I noticed that the paper trembled slightly in his hand as he spoke, "no such person ever applied here."

I glanced toward Jones.

"I saw the picture in the papers this morning, sir, and I am certain I never saw the face before," he said.

The doctor folded up the paper and handed it to me, as I thought, with a slight sigh of relief or fatigue; I could not tell which. I was at my wits' end by this time.

"Will you walk over to the morgue with me, doctor, and see the body?" I asked, as a last resort. "This picture is not at all like her, and it may be possible you could place her better in your mind."

He had been steadily growing more nervous during the conversation, which I attributed to the possible fact that he was overworked or had other matters waiting for his attention. When I made the request that he walk over to the morgue and view the body, he pleaded so many excuses that I

immediately charged him again in my mind with an entire lack of natural interest in the case.

"Let Jones go," he said finally; "he sees every applicant, and it may be that he can help you." He spoke the last sentence as if it hurt him.

I took Jones along at once. On the way, I mentioned the apparent reluctance with which Dr. Throck entered into the matter.

"I am surprised, too," agreed Jones, "for he is usually deeply interested in all such matters, and gladly offers every assistance in his power. He is not feeling well today, though, as he was, hastily summoned out of the city night before last, and came back this morning looking like a ghost."

"Where did he go?" I asked mechanically, for I really did not care about the information.

"He never said a word about that," was the reply. "If I did not know him so well I should certainly think he had been on a spree, for he was dreadfully upset and querulous all morning;" and Jones laughed as he mentioned some of the strange actions of his superior.

I was very busy with my own thoughts, and paid but little attention to his garrulity, until he mentioned a previous occasion upon which Dr. Throck was considerably upset. It was when a lady had called upon him about a week before.

"Did you see her?" I asked alertly.

"I did not see her face," he answered. "She was heavily veiled. They had quite an interview, and when she left the doctor looked as if he could not recall his own name."

"What day was that?" I asked, endeavoring not to betray too much interest.

"That was—yes, that was the day I cut my hand, for I was doing it up when she passed me going into the doctor's private office. That was a week ago Wednesday."

We detectives school ourselves to hide our thoughts and control our features, but I had all I could do to disguise the new light that I discerned in the dark clouds of mystery hanging about the case of Bella Seaford.

Fearful lest Jones should detect my interest in this last piece of information, I changed the subject to other matters.

"There is the body," I said, as I had the slab upon which it reposed pulled out of the cooler, and removed the sheet.

Jones looked over it carefully, and I could see that I was doomed to disappointment so far as he was concerned.

"Never saw her before?" I inquired.

"Never!" he replied.

I pushed the slab back to its place and returned to the hospital.

"Any success?" queried the doctor.

"None whatever," I answered. Jones waxed loquacious, and started in to give a complete description of the woman. It seemed to me that it was with the intention of heading off his volubility, or, it may be, of pretending an interest in the case which I could see he did not feel, that Dr. Throck asked:

"How large a person was she, Jones?"

Whether something in the form of the woman at the morgue reminded Jones of it, or whether he saw a good chance to take a sly dig at his superior, or whether it was one of those mysterious accidents which seem like the workings of an inscrutable Providence, will never be known, but the effect of Jones' reply upon the doctor astonished me, accustomed as I am to thrilling surprises.

"Oh," was his careless retort, "she was just such another in shape and form as that veiled lady who called on you one day last week."

The doctor turned pale, affected a sickly smile, and leaned back in his chair.

"You are not feeling well today, doctor," I remarked. "You are working too hard, I guess." Even then I had no thought of connecting him with the murder, my highest ambition being simply to recall the woman to his recollection.

"Yes, I need rest," he said in thick tones. "My head bothers me."

As he spoke, he rubbed his left hand across his forehead. I started in amazement, and every pulse thrilled with the intensity of the discovery I made.

The middle finger of his left hand was a stub!

CHAPTER III.—TIGHTENING THE CORDS.

I WALKED back and talked with the chief. He was dumbfounded. Still we had nothing tangible to work on after all. I mentioned all the circumstances of my visit to Dr. Throck: his apparent unwillingness to assist in the investigation; his nervousness during the discussion; his refusal to view the body; the janitor's statement that she had, on the Wednesday following her arrival, inquired the way to the Samaritan; the statement of the janitor's wife that she had mailed a letter addressed, "Henry T——"; the fact that a veiled lady had called upon Dr. Throck, and the evident confusion, not to say positive shock, which the very mention of that visit by Jones occasioned; last, but not least, the absence of the first two joints of the middle finger of the doctor's left hand.

"Nothing to warrant an arrest in all that, Bright," remarked the chief. "It is sensationally circumstantial and undoubtedly points the right way, but you must have better information upon which to base a charge of murder."

By quiet inquiry we learned that Dr. Throck had been in the city only about six months. He was young, handsome, and in addition to being a good physician, was possessed of a magnificent tenor voice, and had therefore succeeded, not only in attaining an enviable private practice besides his hospital duties, but had also become a social favorite among the better class.

There was no secret about his antecedents. His last place of residence was a small city in Massachusetts where he had charge of the local hospital. I forwarded a picture of the woman and a description of the case to the chief of police at that point, requesting all obtainable information.

"Well," said Chief Donlan, after I had finished the letter, "there is nothing to do but wait."

Then I called up the Samaritan on the telephone.

"Is Dr. Throck there?" I inquired. The answer came in the affirmative.

"Will he be there for half an hour longer?" I asked.

"Yes."

"All right."

I merely wished to ascertain if I would have time to pursue a little investigation at his rooms without his knowledge, and went to them immediately. I rang the bell and inquired for him of the landlady. He occupied the parlor of a house in a fashionable quarter.

"He is at the hospital now," she said, in reply to my question. "He usually keeps his office hours very punctually here, but the hospital was sadly neglected yesterday on account of a call to Antwerp which detained him all of the night before, and a sudden attack of nervousness which left him prostrated all day yesterday."

"May I leave a note for him?" I asked, wishing to gain access to his desk.

"Certainly," she replied, leading the way to his office.

This was just what I wanted. Surely there was some reason why the doctor should tell such widely different stories of his absence from the hospital the day before. Jones understood that he had been out of town all day, whereas the landlady stated that he had been out nearly all night and had returned suffering from a nervous shock.

She left me for a few moments as I sat down before his desk. I occupied my time in hurriedly turning over the papers. There was the usual amount of professional literature, samples of physic, and various letters and papers in connection with his practice, but really nothing of interest to me.

I thrust my hand into the waste basket, and after unfolding several scraps of unimportant paper, came at last on this, somewhat blurred and poorly written, evidently the work of a nervous hand:

Lydia, do not, I beg of you, visit me again at the hospital. I will, as you wish, call upon you Thursday evening—

The rest of it could only be surmised, for it had evidently been started, crumpled up, and cast into the basket. Things were getting warm for me then. I was on the track. It was on Thursday night that the woman was murdered!

I could hardly contain myself at the turn of affairs. I tried the drawers of the desk. Nothing rewarded my search, and I was going to make a complete inventory of the room when the landlady reëntered.

"What time do you think he will return?" I asked nonchalantly.

"Hardly at all today," she answered; "he said he expected to be very busy between his hospital duties and his regular calls."

"No use leaving a note, then," I remarked casually. "I will endeavor to see him;" and with the crumpled letter in my vest pocket, I bowed myself out.

There seemed nothing more for me to do now, and yet I could not remain entirely idle. I visited the Baxter Building again and talked with a number

of the tenants. Miss Seaford had roomed on the fourth floor. I stopped on the landing of the third to converse with a Mrs. Oldfield, who had a daughter employed in a wholesale millinery house. Anybody going down the stairs after the elevator had ceased running would be obliged to pass her door.

"No, I did not notice any one going down that night, that I can remember," she said.

"Did you hear any footsteps during the night?" I asked.

"No, but come to think, my daughter was out at a party that night, and on the way home with her young man, who always comes up stairs with her when it is late, I heard her say they passed Dr. Throck on the stairs. But of course he was on his professional business."

I visited the young lady and questioned her, eliciting the same information in a roundabout way, being careful not to leave any impression that Dr. Throck was under suspicion in the matter.

Impressed by the fact that up to this time every visit to the Baxter Building had resulted in additional information, I walked back to the place again. It was a large apartment house of the better class, situated in a respectable locality, having every convenience for light housekeeping. The rear end of it ran back to an alley, and, as usual, was not as prepossessing as the front. I took a short cut on this occasion and reached the building by way of the alley, just in time to see the janitor stoop to pick up a shining weapon from the filth and ashes of the refuse bin. The idea flashed upon me at once that the murderer in making his escape by the rear exit had thrown his revolver into the ash receiver on his way out.

"Let me look at that, Nolan," I commanded.

He passed it over. It was dirty, but in good order. I examined it carefully and noted the initials "H. T." upon the handle. "Henry Throck," I thought to myself, as I placed it in my pocket.

"Is there anything new?" I asked.

"Nothing new," he grumbled, evidently sorry to so quickly lose his find.

I visited the chief and laid all the additional evidence before him: the half written letter, Dr. Throck's presence in the building at three in the morning, and the revolver with the initials upon the handle. One chamber of the weapon was empty and it was a .34, the same size cartridge as that found imbedded in the heart of Bella Seaford.

"That's good work, Bright," the chief remarked. "Did no one in the building hear the shot?"

"Not that I can learn," I answered. "Two suites of rooms next 47 are unoccupied, and it is a corner apartment in the building."

"That's clever work on your part, Bright," he repeated. "I think you may safely take your man in now."

CHAPTER IV.—THE ARREST AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

I WAS anxious to distinguish myself in this matter I must confess, and taking a trusty officer in plain clothes with me, I proceeded at once to the hospital.

The doctor was out upon his calls. I sauntered leisurely about the place, and put a few leading questions to Jones.

"Are you sure," I inquired, "that nobody about the hospital saw the face of the veiled lady you mentioned?"

Jones studied a moment.

"Is it possible that the doctor could remain there entirely undisturbed for several hours on a busy day?" I pursued searchingly.

"Oh, no, not at all," he replied, brightening up. "He was summoned out to the wards once or twice."

"Who summoned him?"

"Dr. Leader came to the door once."

"Who else?"

"I don't remember."

"Where is Dr. Leader?"

"He is with the druggist now, putting up prescriptions."

Dr. Leader was one of the visiting physicians. I hunted him up at once, and took him aside.

"Doctor," I began, "I want you to exercise your memory in a very important case."

"Yes?" he answered questioningly.

"A week ago last Wednesday, a lady called upon Dr. Throck, and while she was in his private office, you rapped at his door to summon him out to the wards for some consultation or other. Do you remember?"

"Perfectly."

"As the doctor opened his door, did you catch sight of his visitor?"

"I did."

"Was she veiled?"

"No."

"Would you recognize her face again?"

"I would not be positive, but rather think I would, as it was a strikingly handsome one."

"Is that it?" I asked, and I flashed the morning paper before his eyes. He uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Strange," he observed, "that I did not recall it when I glanced over the paper this morning. This is a poor picture, but very like her."

"Thank you," I said, as I walked back to rejoin my brother officer.

I cooled my heels there for an hour, but Dr. Throck did not appear. I telephoned to his rooms. The landlady answered my call.

Yes, he had been there, and had gone away again without a word. He had taken a small satchel and, she judged, had been hastily summoned out of town. Had not been gone ten minutes.

I left my man at the hospital with orders to detain him by force, if necessary, should he arrive, and started for headquarters. On the way I spied Dr. Throck coming up a side street, satchel in hand.

"Well, doctor," was my pleasant salutation, "going out of town?"

"Only for a day," he replied nervously; "I am summoned away on a consultation."

"Where to?" I asked suddenly.

The question took him by surprise, as he had evidently not yet made up his mind.

"Stoneham," he finally answered.

"Dr. Throck," I said seriously, "we have several questions to put to you yet in regard to that girl. The mystery is so perfectly bewildering that we do not like to relinquish without a hard struggle the only clue we have so far been able to obtain."

"You must excuse me now," he replied hesitatingly; "I shall be pleased and happy to help you all I can, but I must not miss my train."

I looked at my watch. "There is no train north for an hour and a half, doctor. Walk with me to the station house." I started on a step or two as if expecting him to follow without any further demur. He paused, shifted uneasily, looked up and down the street, began an excuse, then abruptly ended it and took his place beside me.

We barely spoke on the way. I led him into the private office, followed by the chief, closed the door, and before he had time to recover his composure, laid my hand upon his quivering shoulder, looked him squarely in the eyes, and solemnly said:

"Dr. Throck, I arrest you for the brutal murder of the woman known as Bella Seaford!"

His pallid face flushed for an instant, then grew pale as death. His lips trembled as in an effort to speak; his big blue eyes glared like those of a frightened fawn; his knees knocked together like reeds in a storm, and he sank helpless as a baby into the chair beside him.

I had arrested him in the very act of fleeing from the hands of outraged justice. There was no doubt of his intentions, as the satchel revealed upon examination. He had gone to the Third National Bank, and drawn out a small amount he had on deposit there, something like a thousand dollars, if I remember correctly, and this money was found in the satchel. A man would not do that if he only contemplated going to Stoneham upon a matter of professional consultation.

As I looked back upon his actions in the light of the evidence in my possession, his conduct throughout appeared that of a most cowardly impotent. Without leaving one trace behind him, as he thought, to connect him with the murder of the girl, he yet had not the courage to act out the part he had assumed. Instead of assisting me in my investigations, he retarded my progress in various ways, which now appeared to me as utterly childish and idiotic. Had he really the nerve of a man bold enough to perpetrate so foul a crime, why did he not preserve a cool demeanor and a smiling face to the end? His chances of escape would have been infinitely better, for nothing was further from my mind than the idea of connecting Dr. Throck with the murder, when I called to inquire regarding the woman. This reasoning may smack of sadly perverted mortals to some good people, but we detectives like to see a man play his game out. If we go after a desperado we like to land a dangerous villain, not a weak kneed boy, and if we sharpen our wits to catch a daring, cold blooded murderer, we do not like to find him, after all,

a cringing, crying infant. If I go gunning for deer, I don't care to waste my ammunition on rabbits.

I felt for him nothing but the deepest disgust. He fell to pieces for a few minutes like a distracted child, and I really feared his mind would give way under the severe tension.

The words of the chief, however, recalled him to himself surprisingly.

"Come, doctor," said Donlan, "the game is up. Make a clean breast of the whole affair to Bright and me."

I was never so deceived in human nature in my life. He regained his composure instantly. His lips set firmly together and his large blue eyes, blurred with unshed tears a moment before, opened up with a steady, calm intelligence.

"The position of a criminal, and worst of all, a murderer, chief, is an entirely new one for me," he said with quiet deliberation. "You will pardon if I decline to speak further than to assert my innocence."

"It is useless, doctor, to assert your innocence," I said, quoting his words sarcastically. "I know that the woman visited you a week ago last Wednesday; that you objected to further visits at the hospital; that you decided to visit her at her room last Thursday evening; that you did so visit her instead of going out of town, as you stated at the hospital; that you remained in the building until three o'clock in the morning, and that the weapon bearing your initials, 'H. T.', and with which the crime was committed, was found where you yourself cast it, in the ash pit, as you made your escape from the rear end of the Baxter Building. You see, doctor, it is useless for you to attempt a defense."

"That you do know all these facts, Mr. Bright, is all the more reason why I should feel my way carefully in order to defend myself. Please consider this decision final—that I have nothing at all to say except that I am innocent of crime. When the proper time comes to speak I will tell the truth."

He spoke this in clear, decisive tones. He was no longer the timid child, but the determined man, fighting for his life. Every vestige of nervous fear had departed from his frame. He was composed, alert, resourceful; and I felt that in the coming trial he would defend himself like a lion at bay.

I will skip the details in the collection of the evidence against him. In due time I received a letter from the chief of police at Greenwood detailing his history. The woman was identified as Lydia Sater, wife of John Sater, Dr. Throck's foster brother. The best of good feeling had always apparently existed between them. Sater had disappeared from his home, leaving no trace behind. That was all.

Public opinion ran high. It was safe to say that Dr. Throck had no friends. The evidence was so overwhelmingly accusing that no one ventured to take his part.

Pending his examination, he refused to see a lawyer or speak a word about the case to any one, saying simply that he was innocent; that he had his own story to tell, and be the consequences what they might, he would tell it in his own way.

Though clearly convinced of his guilt I warmed toward him, for the

splendid nerve which had so suddenly come to his support the day of his arrest remained with him to the very last, and challenged my unbounded admiration.

Statement of the Prisoner's Attorney, Including Dr. Throck's Story, as Told by Himself to the Judge and Jury, Copied from the Records of the Court Scribe.

CHAPTER V.—LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR THE DEFENSE.

WHEN, at the examination of Dr. Henry Throck, upon the charge of murdering Bella Seaford, Judge King assigned me as his counsel against the expressed desire of the prisoner, I entered upon the case with many sore misgivings. Old criminal lawyers, friends of my celebrated father, had often patted me on the back during my student days, and judging of my abilities probably by the laws of descent and heredity, had predicted for me a brilliant future in criminal practice. Still, had I my choice, my first great case should have been one offering at the outset some possible hope of success. The case in question did not present any such agreeable feature. Not only the coroner's inquest, but the examination of the prisoner as well, revealed against him, link by link, such a strong chain of evidence, circumstantial but conclusive, that any prospect of breaking it, in whole or in part, seemed as remote as would be the acquittal, in the average Christian mind, of Judas on a charge of perfidy.

When Dr. Throck declared at the examination that he neither had nor desired the services of an attorney, it was looked upon as an inkling of what his defense would probably be. It seemed plain enough to all present that throughout the whole case he was going to pose as an eccentric, with the usual end in view of creating the impression that he was mentally unsound.

Nothing, as I soon discovered, was further from his intentions.

I was assigned to his defense at eleven o'clock in the morning and he was immediately remanded to jail to await trial. I saw him for a while, and after telling him that business matters would prevent me from talking with him until after supper that evening, and cautioning him to maintain the same discreet silence which had been his remarkable characteristic up to that time, I shook hands with him cordially and saw him led back to his cell.

The "matters of business" I had alleged in my conversation with Dr. Throck were nothing more nor less than the sifting of all the evidence against him and familiarizing myself perfectly with the case so far as the details were known.

In the course of my investigation I met Bright, the detective who had worked up the clues against him. There was no secret now about these clues, as all the information had come out in the examination. He showed me the piece of carpet.

"Is it not a little strange," I asked, "if that impression was made while the crime was fresh and the blood warm, that new currents of blood flowing from the body did not fill up the indentations formed by that hand pressure?"

Bright was puzzled. "There is only one man can explain that," he answered at length, "and that's the doctor himself."

The magnifying glass revealed the fact also that in some spots beneath the alleged hand the fiber of the carpet remained clearly defined. "How do you account for that?" I asked.

"I don't account for it at all," he answered testily. "It is undoubtedly the mark of his hand, so what does it matter, anyhow?"

"It may matter a great deal later on, Mr. Bright," I answered, for in some strange manner that imprint of a hand filled me with conflicting feelings of failure and success. It seemed to me that all I feared, as well as all I hoped, would turn eventually on that bit of evidence.

I had a long talk with the doctor that evening. At first he was disinclined to accept me, saying that he was satisfied to rest his safety on his own feeling of perfect innocence.

"Doctor," I said, "you are unwise. It is not always the right which is successful in law. The wrong well argued often triumphs over the right poorly presented. The prosecution will array every scrap of evidence against you. It would be madness, suicide, for you to simply rise before the court and declare your innocence, as you have now to me. This is a case of life or death for you. You should rise to a full realization of it, and fight it to the last. Do not consider me too anxious to defend you," I concluded, as I thought it possible he might not be satisfied to have a young and untried lawyer take hold of his case. "If you have any other preference, I will retire. It is only a form for the court to assign a lawyer in such cases, and although I offer you my best services with all my heart, I shall as willingly step down and out if you prefer a more experienced attorney."

He seemed to study me for a moment, and ended by extending his hand. I grasped it fervently and cordially.

"Let us be friends," he said warmly and with some emotion. "God knows I need friendship and advice, and I will trust you to give me both."

"What was your object in holding out so long in your determination to make your own defense?" I asked, after a short pause.

"Simply the bitterness of my heart," he answered earnestly. "When Bright enumerated all the evidence he had against me a few days ago, I saw how every one would feel toward me. I realized that every hand would be raised against me, that every door of friendly counsel would be closed to me, and taking refuge in my own consciousness of innocence I felt that I would take my stand on that high ground, and with God's justice to protect me, defy the whole world to hang me."

He spoke the last words with stronger emphasis, and I felt at once the wonderful superiority of the force and intellect his awful danger had summoned to his aid.

I always did believe that the situation makes the man, and that we all alike are endowed with unknown capacities which nothing but the gravest responsibilities can command.

Hour after hour I listened to his story, enrapt, bewildered, charmed, won by his argument and bewitched by his eloquence.

The city clocks were striking two as the jail doors closed behind me.

"Guilty or not guilty, Henry Throck will never hang!" I concluded mentally as I wended my way homeward through the lonely streets.

CHAPTER VI.—OUR SIDE SCORES ONE.

I ABANDONED everything else to be free to devote all my time to his case, but really there was little to do, for the simple reason that all the evidence against him was circumstantial and correct, and I found, as in fact he insisted from the beginning, that it must be so admitted.

The woman had called to see him. He had begged her not to come again to his office in the Samaritan. He had visited her the night of the murder and had remained in the building until three o'clock in the morning, as was proved by Miss Oldfield. The revolver bearing his initials, found in the ash pit, with one chamber empty, and the caliber corresponding with the bullet found in the body of the woman, was identified as his positively by Jones. These circumstances could not be disproved, and must therefore be admitted if he went upon the stand. If he refrained from testifying they might be contested sufficiently to raise a doubt in the minds of the jury, but if he took the stand in his own defense, which seemed after all the only safe course to pursue, all these accusing circumstances must be either admitted or explained.

I confess I was anxious as the day of trial approached. Based on information obtained from Dr. Throck, I wrote to Greenwood, the home of Bella Seaford, whose maiden name, by the way, was Lydia Markham, but who at the time of the murder bore the name of Sater, having married a man named John Sater about a year before. He and Dr. Throck had been suitors for the hand of the girl, and therein lay the strongest part of Dr. Throck's defense.

I failed utterly in tracing this man Sater. Several days before the commission of the crime he had suddenly left his home without a word of explanation.

When court assembled on the day of the trial, the room was crowded to its fullest capacity. The case, while deeply sensational, on account of its impenetrable mystery, had not so far developed the slightest tinge of the usual vulgar features, so that many who could not have countenanced the ordinary murder trial were present during this. Women predominated, as the doctor had been a great social favorite, and the public had undergone some slight change of feeling, due to his mysterious silence and the consequent curiosity regarding his line of defense.

He took his seat with perfect ease and composure, looking neither to the right nor to the left. The women pitied him, he was so dignified and handsome—that was easy to see—and the men cast cold glances of mingled aversion and curiosity in his direction.

The district attorney presented his case, after the jury was secured. The latter was not a very difficult task, although I took care to challenge, on some ground or other, all who appeared hard, calculating, and soulless. I felt that

the character of the defense was going to be such as to appeal only to men of heart, conscience, and imaginative temperament, and I gained my point, for never did a worthier body of men grace a jury box.

Step by step the district attorney proceeded, as it were, on his way to the gallows with his prisoner. Strand by strand was woven about his neck the rope that was to hang him. I could do but little. All of the evidence we were prepared to admit any way, and in justice to the various witnesses I am free to confess that their testimony was honest and impartial.

I raised no objections as the prosecution went on. Old lawyers, friends of my late father, who had hoped brilliant things for me, eyed me pityingly, and I could easily see wondered what I had been doing on the case. Murmurs of aversion and dislike of the prisoner were barely audible here and there as the guilt of the man became more and more apparent, and the defense appeared so manifestly unable to stem the tide. This was particularly noticeable when John Bright took the stand and displayed the piece of bloody carpet, showed the imprint of the hand upon it, and pointed out the absence of the middle finger.

All the evidence for the people was heard that day.

Dr. Leader testified, from a photograph of the murdered woman, to her identity as the woman he had seen in Dr. Throck's office.

Dr. Throck's landlady proved that he had returned to his rooms about 3:30 on the morning of the 4th of October, and remained home all day, suffering from nervous shock.

Miss Oldfield testified to meeting Dr. Throck upon the stairs of the Baxter Building, at three o'clock on the morning of October 4.

Bright produced the pistol found in the ash pit of the Baxter Building, and Jones positively identified it as belonging to Dr. Throck.

The imprint and the missing finger tallying with the shape and form of the doctor's left hand had been dwelt upon at due length by the district attorney, and when court adjourned for the day it was plain to be seen that Dr. Throck at that moment stood convicted of murder in the minds of all.

But the defense was yet to come. I was never in my life more cool and calm than at the moment I rose to open it the following day.

There was an expectant hush about the place, as I stepped toward the center before the judge's desk. I had sat passively by during the introduction of the evidence of the previous day, and the prisoner himself appeared so calm and undisturbed, that after a night's reflection, the people had taken it all as a still deeper turn of the mystery, and crowded the courtroom in greater numbers than on the former occasion. Even the judge and jury seemed to partake of the intense suppressed excitement of the hour, and leaned toward me at the time as if bending under a weight of unasked questions.

I will pass over my remarks in opening the defense and go on to the testimony of the first witness. It was Dr. Leonard Vincent, a surgeon celebrated far and near as a master of his profession. He was requested to examine the piece of carpet.

"Doctor," I asked, "do you discern there the outlines of a hand?"

"It is unmistakably the imprint of a hand," he replied.

"Do you notice the absence of any of the fingers?"

"The third finger of the hand has certainly left no impression," he replied.

"Should you conclude from that that the hand that left that imprint had a mutilated or deformed middle finger?"

"That would be the most natural conclusion," he testified.

"Doctor," I pursued, "you have had a great deal of experience in wounds and accidents causing blood to flow from the human body. How long do you think a hand should remain in that place to produce that imprint?"

"If the hand was placed there when the blood was fresh," he answered, "it would have to remain there for a period of from one to two hours to allow the blood to coagulate sufficiently to produce and retain that impression."

I glanced around the courtroom. Everybody wore a puzzled expression. The defense was growing more mysterious now.

"Doctor, have you a magnifying glass with you?" I knew he had, for I had instructed him to bring one.

"I have," was the reply.

"Now, I want you to examine that exhibit carefully and say whether, in your opinion, that hand was there before the blood flowed in around it, or whether it was placed there after the blood was shed?"

Although ignorant of the exact import of this question, every one felt that it had some startling bearing upon the case, and the doctor's minute examination of the article was watched, and his answer awaited with breathless interest.

"My opinion is," he said at length, "that the hand was there before the blood was shed."

"Will you kindly state to the court your reason for that conclusion?"

"My reason is, that under the glass I find some spots, especially under the palm of the hand, in which the fiber of the carpet appears unstained. I judge that the fleshy part of the hand rested so heavily there that the blood did not penetrate to it."

"Then your testimony is to the effect that the hand was pressed upon the carpet before the blood was shed, and that it remained in that position for from one to two hours after the deed was committed?"

"Yes, sir, that is my opinion."

I excused him and summoned several others, eliciting from all the same general verdict. Then I requested that Detective Bright be recalled. Bright knew what I wanted evidently, for it did not take him long to admit that his judgment agreed with that of the doctors. The district attorney made an unsuccessful effort to have him declare he was unable to pass an opinion, but the court insisted, at my suggestion, upon a "Yes" or "No" answer. He glanced at me with a smile of derision as he passed down from the stand, and I recalled the words he had used when he first showed me the damaging evidence: "What does it matter, anyhow?"

Court adjourned for dinner just here, and I had the opportunity of meeting a number of my legal friends, all of whom, without exception, considered it their duty to sympathize with me.

CHAPTER VII.—THE PRISONER BEGINS HIS STORY.

AT the reassembling of court, I arose and stated that the evidence for the defense was all in except the voluntary statement of the prisoner himself.

A buzz of excitement passed around the room which was promptly suppressed by the court officers. I admitted in every detail the accuracy of the evidence submitted by the people, and begged the jury to particularly remember the testimony of the doctors as well as the admission of the chief witness for the prosecution, Detective Bright, that the hand, which we admitted was the doctor's, was lying upon the carpet before the commission of the crime, and still remained there for from one to two hours thereafter.

With this brief statement, and with a request to the court that the prisoner on trial for his life be allowed to finish his story uninterrupted, I invited Dr. Throck to the witness stand.

The request was unnecessary. From the moment he arose until he finished his story not a sound save his voice and the pen of the court stenographer was heard within the room, so breathless was the attention he commanded.

I give his words in full as copied from the court records, but I can never describe the dramatic effect with which they were spoken or the marvelous spell which they produced upon his hearers, who a moment before would have considered it a special privilege to be allowed to hang him there and then.

He began easily and deliberately after being sworn, and knowing, as I did, that his story had never been committed to paper, I marveled at his wonderful choice and fluency of language, and felt impressed more than ever by my pet theory that we are all but the creatures of circumstance, and that conditions make us what we are. Here indeed was an astonishing exemplification of it, in the case of a man who had not the courage of an infant in the face of an accusation, and yet, brought to bay for his life, reached heights of eloquence truly sublime, by talents which never under any other circumstances would have appeared in his character; talents which, God forbid, a like combination of circumstances would ever force to the brilliant surface again.

"In the simplicity of my nature," he began, "I have maintained from the beginning, to the wonder of many, no doubt, that I have no defense to make to this awful charge, except the simple statement that I am innocent. I am unused to scenes of this character, and in all my life this is the first time I ever saw the interior or viewed the proceedings of a courtroom. I realize now, more than I did before, the necessity for something beyond a mere denial of the charge against me. I read it in the looks of surprise which I felt, rather than saw, on all the faces in this room when my able counsel admitted that all the evidence developed by the prosecution was literally true. I read it now in the hushed attention of the people and in the expectant faces of the jury, and I purpose making more than a mere

denial of the charge and a simple assertion of my innocence. I must tell the whole story of my life to carry the conviction of my innocence, and let heaven be my witness, it shall be, as I have just sworn it should be, "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

He paused solemnly for a moment with uplifted hand. His was the natural grace of the orator in speech and gesture.

"I have nothing in my history to conceal," he resumed. "I was left an orphan at a very tender age, and an old friend of my father, living in the city of Greenwood, Massachusetts, adopted me and reared me as his own. This man, Archibald Sater by name, had an only son, John Sater, exactly my own age, but entirely my opposite. He was weak and puny; I was strong and muscular. My foster father hoped I would repay all his kindness by becoming a guardian angel, in a sense, to his boy. And so I did.

"John Sater and I were inseparable. No real brothers could ever have been more loyal to each other than were we. I shared his sorrows and his joys. I bore the brunt of all his battles. I helped him out of all his troubles when we were lads at school, and when we were boys at college I aided him in all his studies. That he loved me as well as I loved him I have not the slightest doubt; but a strange fatality about our intimacy all through life was the fact that he was continually, without evil intention on his part, the innocent cause of trouble to me. I could quote many instances of this occurring in childhood days, but one will be sufficient to clear the point. Once, in pure boyish mischief, he stole the schoolmaster's penknife, kept it for several days, and then requested me to carry it up and leave it on the master's desk. I did so, and received the trouncing which should have been inflicted on my foster brother, if at all.

"After we grew up and entered college there were many such experiences. My expenses were usually as much again as his, to the amazement, and often the suspicion, of my foster father, because John borrowed more than half my allowance and left me always poor and needy. For his sake, for I loved him, I bore it all in patience and in silence. He would bring half a dozen boon companions to my room, and cause me to be reported to the dean for late hours and noisy company.

"It was not his fault that he was getting me continually into difficulties. I believe in the doctrine of the reincarnation of the soul. I believe that on and on through all the succeeding ages the eternal soul of man repeats its experiment over and over again in the human form. It is my belief that the everlasting spirit pursues this endless circuit of mankind, passing from one body at the moment of death to another living habitation, thus fulfilling the destiny marked out for it by a wise Creator at the beginning of that soul's career. I believe that, far above and beyond the horizon of our poor earthly perceptions, the souls enthroned in our minds have hopes and fears, have joys and sorrows, and good and bad intents, in their own lofty planes, similar, though greater, grander, and more mysterious than those which disturb the tranquillity of our puny intellects.

"On no other hypothesis can I account for the strange and disastrous results of my intimacy with John Sater. Try, as I know he always did, to

serve me well, his best intents seemed thwarted by a subtle, mysterious agency mightier than his own, as if the soul that ruled his honest mind seemed bent upon overturning all his noble efforts in my behalf in very spite against the spirit which had found its lodgment in me at my birth.

"I will not trouble the court with further instances of this nature now, but will go on with my story.

"As boys, we had a sweetheart, a neighbor's daughter, Lydia Markham, and following out the strange fatality of our lives, we both adored her, even as children. Years before the real significance of the question came to us we used playfully to dispute each other's right to marry her.

"Which of us do you love best, Lydia?" he or I had often asked, but she would only toss her curly head, and glance from one to the other in coquettish indecision.

"During our college days she was frequently the subject of our conversation, and each one recognized that the other dearly loved her. The night before our graduating exercises we sat up late together, and talked of our plans for the future. I had decided to study medicine. He had arranged to go into business with his father. Gradually we drifted to other things. Finally he said :

"Now confess, Henry, do you love Lydia? Does she figure in your hopes for the future?"

"Yes," I answered, for the question was a fair one. "I love Lydia, and so do you, old man. It has been a source of trouble to me for some time past."

"I will be just as candid with you, Henry," he said. "I do love her. You know when we were children, and used to dispute about her, we should have settled the matter then. It would have saved one of us many a sore regret."

"I looked at him and he looked at me. There had never been a secret between us. Why should there be now?"

CHAPTER VIII.—"SHE HAD HER CHOICE."

"JOHN," I said at length, as calmly as I could, "we have been more than brothers to each other. You and I have known many brothers who did not love and respect each other half as much as do you and I."

"That is the truth well stated," he said warmly.

"The love that lodged between us as little children," I resumed, "and strengthened with our years, must not be rudely broken now when we need each other's inspiration and encouragement in the battle of life."

"That's what I say, Henry!" exclaimed the whole souled fellow. "Let us patch up a truce and decide on some fair plan of testing her affection, by which each shall abide in perfect satisfaction."

"I am agreeable to that," I replied. "I know I can trust you, and I think you know that you can trust me, and ——"

"If I cannot trust you, Henry, I will never put my faith in mortal man," he interrupted warmly.

"Well," I inquired, "how shall we arrange?"

" 'Name your own conditions,' he answered good naturedly. 'Make them to suit yourself.'

" 'It's just like this,' I said: 'We are now twenty two. In two years I will matriculate as a physician. I would not feel justified in asking her to engage herself to me so far ahead, should she prefer me, and you can easily afford to wait, especially as your father does not wish you to marry young.'

" 'That's all right, Henry,' he exclaimed enthusiastically. 'Then it is understood that each of us may visit her and enjoy her society in the mean time.'

" 'Agreed,' I said, 'but not a word of love.'

" 'How are we finally to arrange it?' he asked. 'I'll tell you,' he continued, as his face brightened. 'When you are ready to propose, we will both do so, in writing, the same day, and by the same mail.'

" I studied the proposition for a moment. I could see nothing wrong in it. If either one of us proposed first, it would place Lydia in an embarrassing position and be unfair to the other, as she might think that other indifferent. After all, it seemed the proper way to arrange it, considering the bond of love and foster brotherhood between us.

" 'I will say this here and now, Henry,' the noble hearted fellow exclaimed, as he wrung my hand. 'No living woman shall ever come between us. Whatever her preference may be it will be fair on either side, and should she choose you, I am still your friend and your brother, while life lasts.'

" I do not need to say that I returned the warm pressure of his hand and assured him of the same undying sentiment on my part.

" We never referred again to this solemn compact until I had secured my diploma. Every vacation was spent at home, and every spare moment of my time was spent in Lydia's sweet companionship. So fair with me was John Sater, that on such occasions he allowed me to monopolize her society, although I knew that he adored her. But he was at home constantly, and could bask in the sunshine of her smiles while I was far away. Through it all, I declare with perfect honesty I never felt a jealous throb, so implicitly did I trust him to honor our strange agreement.

" Immediately after securing my diploma, I started for home. My foster father had obtained for me the charge of the local hospital, which had really begun its existence through a generous gift from him many years before. I received from John the sad intelligence that Lydia Markham's father had suffered serious financial reverses, and that the family were struggling for bare existence.

" 'I see what you are thinking about, old man,' he said, with a pleasant smile. 'Let us do it tomorrow.'

" 'Agreed,' was my reply.

" I wrote my letter that night. A letter full of love and tenderness and containing an offer of marriage. I went to his office the following morning. He was ready. Together we walked to the post box on the corner and deposited our letters.

" I took up my duties at the hospital at once, and for a week waited

anxiously, day after day, for a reply. Each night I retired with a prayer upon my lips, and each morning I awoke with a newborn hope in my heart. Neither John nor I referred to the subject. By mutual agreement neither of us was to visit her pending her decision.

"By the merest accident I met her. She looked pale and worried.

"'Why do you not come to see me, Henry?' she asked, with a smile that was plainly forced. 'Have you completely forgotten the little sweetheart of other days?'

"'I am simply waiting, Lydia,' I answered in a shamefaced way, for I thought of the compact bound by my sacred honor.

"'Waiting?' she questioned, with a smile that drove me nearly mad.

"'Yes, I will—I am very busy these days, you see, and——' I stammered very awkwardly.

"The smile faded from her face and a look of pained surprise swept over her lovely features, as she passed on without another word.

"Oh, God! If I had only known at that time the true significance of her actions and her words, what awful misery it might have saved us all?

"But I will pass over these harrowing details. That night my friend, my foster brother, received his answer. It was 'Yes.'

"My words are feeble to tell the anguish of my soul.

"'I congratulate you, John,' I said brokenly, pressing his hand as warmly as I could. 'Never let her know that I have suffered.'

"I buried myself deep in my work. I threw myself madly into the practice of my profession. But I could not forget my sorrow. After a time I grew more resigned to the situation, and I pledge you my sacred word of honor that never once in all those sad days and dark nights of agony did a bitter pang of jealousy enter my mind. To me John Sater was still my friend and brother and Lydia Markham was his promised wife.

"The wedding day drew near. I had planned to go away on a vacation until it was over, but John would not hear of it.

"'It will cause talk,' he said. 'I have never yet told any of the circumstances to Lydia. She rarely mentions your name.' My heart sank as he spoke the words. 'She has no idea that you have suffered, Henry, and it will be a good chance for you to meet her, and school yourself to do it regularly hereafter. We must not let this marriage of mine divide us. There is a good fellow, now. Won't you stay?'

"In the quiet of my own room I thought it all over. Yes, John was right. I should school myself to meet her.

"As I entered the dining room the following morning John looked up at me inquiringly. I took his hand. 'I will remain,' I said simply.

"'Thank you, Henry, I could not do without you,' was his answer.

"I quietly set about getting another position, and sent out letters to friends in various parts of the country, one to the managers of the Samaritan here. I could not bear to meet her every day.

"The wedding passed off without distressing incident. Once, when the bride caught my glance by accident, I fancy she slightly paled, but I consoled myself by the thought that it must have been only my imagination. I

passed through the ordeal without betraying my emotion, except when I took Lydia's hand to congratulate her.

"My own shook as with palsy, and I could not meet her eyes. She said something in reply, and I wandered aimlessly away and lost myself among the guests.

"'You did splendidly,' was John's remark upon finding me, later on, in the garden.

"'Oh, I am all over it now, John,' I answered reassuringly, and in as calm a tone as I could command. 'Put it all out of your head forever, old man. You are my brother, and she is your wife. You understand me, don't you?'

"While they were away upon their wedding journey, I secured the place I lately occupied at the Samaritan Hospital in this city. I had intended to leave before they returned, but was unable to close up my affairs in time. John was to bring his wife to his father's house, and as I had continued to live there just as when we were boys together, I had not the heart to meet her daily.

"They arrived in the evening just as we were rising from dinner, and pleading an important case at the hospital, I excused myself after the first salutations were over.

"About ten o'clock John called for me.

"'I could not wait for you to come,' he said warmly. 'I wanted to see you and talk with you alone. Henry, I was never so happy in my life.'

"I had nerved myself for this, and, without a trace of deeper feeling, assured him of my pleasure in his happiness.

"We lighted our cigars and walked home together, his arm in mine. I was so far recovered that I even revelled with him in his unbounded joy, glad and thankful that the two I loved most on earth were happy.

"We paused upon the doorstep to take a last whiff of our cigars before casting them away. The door was wide open behind us, as it was late in the spring and the night was mild. The hall gas was burning faintly when we arrived.

"'Henry,' said John proudly, 'let me congratulate you on your success in hiding your trouble so well. You are every inch the man I always knew you.'

"'It is buried forever, John,' I answered, although I felt the words thickening on my tongue. 'We mailed the letters on the same day and at the same moment. She had her choice, and I am glad she is happy.'

"'Yes, she herself made the choice between us, Henry, but had she chosen you instead of me, you would still remain as you are tonight—my closest friend and brother.'

"There was the sound of a half stifled exclamation behind us. We turned in time to see Lydia rising blindly from the wide seat of the hall stand, a look of surprise and horror overspreading her beautiful features. She seemed endeavoring to speak, while one jeweled hand clutched convulsively at her fair white throat. She staggered toward us a moment, gasped incoherently, once or twice, and then fell fainting into John's arms.

"I found my way to my room and cast myself headlong upon the sofa. My heart was beating wildly. My brain was throbbing madly at my temples, and I dared not think."

CHAPTER IX.—THE AFTERMATH.

"I QUICKLY prepared for my departure. The following morning I announced my determination to John. Without referring to the subject of Lydia's action the night before, I felt certain he shared my suspicion as to its cause. He interposed no objection or argument against my decision, but I could see that the separation troubled him, for instinct seemed to tell us it would be lifelong.

"I was to leave on the afternoon of the next day. I fortunately had not again met Lydia. I don't know how I could have survived the ordeal had she appeared at the table.

"I was all ready to go. My trunks had been sent on to the station and I was nerving myself to meet her, for I felt, rather than expected, that she would come down to bid me good by.

"John and I had been conversing in the parlor, and he had excused himself to ascertain the cause of the coachman's delay. Suddenly I heard a light footfall behind me, and turned to confront—Lydia, pale, worn and distraught.

"'I could not let you go, Henry,' she said, with a great effort to be calm, 'without seeing you once again. I want you to know that I never knew of that horrid compact between you and John until last night.' Then her voice utterly failed her, and breaking down completely, she sobbed as her head fell upon my shoulder. 'I never, never got your letter.'

"My worst suspicions were realized. My heart was torn asunder by this proof of my agonizing fears of the night before.

"'Understand, Lydia,' I said, endeavoring to remove any unjust suspicions she might cherish, 'that that compact, foolish and wicked though I see it now, was agreed to, in cold blood, on both sides. John loves you better than life itself, and his part of the agreement was as honorably executed as my own.'

"'I believe it, Henry, but I can never be the same to him again.' She was standing before me now, with her face buried in her hands, the tears trickling through her fingers, and every one dropping like a coal of fire into my very soul. 'I have not spoken to him since,' she continued, with a sob in every word. 'I cannot bear to look upon his face. Oh, Henry! Henry! I shall end by hating him or going mad!'

"I cannot merely say I pitied her. The words are meaningless to express my agony. My heart bled for her. But then came the call to honor—she was John's wife!

"'You must put it all out of your mind forever, Lydia. John is so true, so noble, and so good, you cannot help but love him.'

"'Do not tell me that!' she cried frantically, and she seemed so changed in an instant that her words and tone appalled me. 'I loved you and you

only, Henry, all my life. Let us leave here together ! Bid me follow you, and in some other place find that true companionship of soul of which a cruel fate deprived us here !'

"I was shocked and horrified at the proposal. Neither of us noted that John had entered, and stung to the heart by her words, stood rooted to the ground.

" 'Lydia, you are mad,' I answered sternly. "It is true I loved you and my disappointment gives me pain, but John Sater is my friend and brother. You can never be aught to me but John's wife !'

"While I spoke, she moved as if to throw herself upon me, but with a stern gesture I warned her back.

"The next moment John had stepped between us, white to the lips, but with a look upon his face which I shall remember to my dying day.

" 'I heard your words, Lydia,' he said, with quick, sharp emphasis, 'and I did not need to wait for Henry's answer. I knew what it would be before the words were spoken. Lydia, you cannot be yourself today. We will forget that this has occurred, but I have one warning to express. Had you disclosed to me your preference before our wedding day you would now have been the wife of Henry Throck. Fate has willed it otherwise. You are my wife and such you must remain,' and here he raised his right hand to heaven, 'but I solemnly swear that if you ever leave me in that way, or prove faithless to the vows you willing pledged the day you wed me, I will strike you dead !'

"She sank, sobbing, upon the lounge. Without a word, without a look in her direction, I left the place, followed by John.

"Six months passed away, and found me greatly changed. Engrossed in my new duties, and rapidly acquiring an enviable private practice, the old wound had gradually healed. That I still loved I do not deny, but I loved the memory of the dear little dark haired sweetheart whose books I used to carry and whose dainty form I lifted over many a muddy way. It was not the woman who pleaded with me to wreck her husband's home and sacrifice my honor. I could think of her calmly now and wish her, as in truth I always did since her marriage, long life and happiness as John's wife.

"It was not with a lover's joy that I met her the day she visited me at the hospital. I was pained and shocked when she told me her story. She had left her home and friends forever. I begged and pleaded with her to return. I scolded, argued, and commanded, but all to no avail. She wanted to be near me. She urged her love for me ; her hatred of home and John. But my sacred honor was my protecting shield. I would not listen to her. Jones has testified to my condition when she left me, but he could not tell the court, nor can I express, the sufferings I endured. I had begged her not to come to me again at the hospital, and at parting adjured her to go home.

"Several days passed, and I hoped that she had seen the right way clearly before her and returned to her husband. But it was not so. I received a letter from her threatening to call upon me at the hospital if did not visit her. What was I to do ? I took my pen to answer, but my hand

trembled so that I could not write. I cast several unfinished letters into the waste basket before I at last succeeded in framing one intelligently. I promised that I would call upon her the following evening. It was the cruel hand of fate that guided me there that night.

"The old discussion was renewed. I begged and prayed with her to go back to John, but she remained perversely obdurate. Early in the night I tried to leave but she insisted upon my acceptance of a cup of tea. I could not refuse. She brewed it herself, and as she moved about I observed that, beautiful as she had been as a girl, she was a thousand fold more lovely as a woman grown. But beautiful as she was, she was still John's wife to me, and here upon my solemn oath, with God above me, I declare that not a thought of evil occupied my mind.

"Just as she placed the tea before me she said :

"'Henry, I cannot believe that you have ceased to love me. It cannot be that the heart in which I innocently caused so much of suffering, has now no room for one who loves you so madly. Father was in debt and penniless. I never received your letter, and when I met you and you evaded me so strangely, I thought that you had ceased to love me. Henry ! Henry !' she cried throwing herself wildly upon me, 'I cannot live without you. I would rather send a bullet through my heart than go back again to live with John !'

"I attempted to put her from me, and began all the old arguments over again. She interrupted me with a sudden change of expression, and with a light laugh, gay but hysterical, invited me to partake of her tea. For some moments we remained silent. She watched me furtively, it seemed to me, while I drank. I soon experienced a strange feeling in my head and fought against it by rising and getting ready to depart. What happened after that I cannot tell, for I was only conscious of a dark cloud obscuring my sight, a dizziness in my head, a trembling sensation in my knees, and the consciousness of falling, falling, falling, until it seemed that I would never reach the floor."

CHAPTER X.—THE FINAL ACT.

"WHEN the first normal sensations began to appear in my mind again, I seemed to recall a dream away back somewhere in the past. It seemed to me that hours before and deep in the silence of the night, I had opened my heavy eyelids, and had seen John stealthily passing out through the door and closing it softly behind him. It may have been really a dream, or it may have been only a faint momentary flitting of semi consciousness, but the idea, reality, vision, or whatever it may have been, was with me when I awoke, hovering like a phantom in my fevered mind.

"Gradually I began to recall my drugged sensibilities. My left hand felt strangely stiff. I raised it in the dim light of the one gas jet, still burning in the room. Horrors ! It was covered with blood ! Not till that instant had I realized fully where I was. I gained my feet, and my heart stopped beating as my affrighted gaze fell upon the scene before me. Lydia

lay stretched upon the floor, her head resting upon her arm, a sweet smile upon her beautiful features, and a pool of blood beneath and around her which had flowed from a horrid wound in her breast.

"I can never describe the pain, the terror, and the agony of the next half hour. I pressed my hand to her cheek, still fair and lovely even in death. It was cold. I looked anxiously at my watch. It was half past two. A thrill of terror at my awful situation frightened me into caution. Like a criminal I crept stealthily to the door and turned the key. My brain was rent by a confusion of terrible fancies. Who had done this awful deed? My eyes caught the glitter of a shining weapon on the floor. I picked it up nervously. It was my own. I could not believe my senses, and instinctively thrust my hand into my hip pocket, to find it empty. Then in that awful moment a thought more maddening than all the rest found shape within my seething, bursting brain!

"'Oh, God! God! Spare me that!' I cried in heart-rent agony. 'Do not let me think I killed her! Lydia! Lydia! If the soul that loved me so madly in life loves me still, come back—back from the shades of death and tell me—tell me I am innocent! Lydia! Lydia!'

"I know I swooned at the awful thought, but when reason once again asserted its control of me, my real self was stunned by the appalling sense of the danger in which I stood. I would have fled from the judgment of the world.

"I felt the dreadful force of the evidence against me, and feared the law. I cannot explain this crime. You must judge it as best you can. Failing in her last effort to win me from allegiance to my friend and brother, she may have committed the deed herself with my pistol while I was insensible upon the floor. Crazy by her faithless conduct toward him, her husband may have sought her out and wreaked his threatened vengeance upon her. It is not for me to say. If I killed her, I had no motive for it, and it was done while I was under the influence of the drug she gave me, for what purpose will never be known. No living man dare say I murdered her! Only God in his infinite wisdom may judge of her death. I can only repeat that, guilty or not guilty, I am innocent of crime in His sight, and as you hope one day to pass in judgment before His stern face, find your verdict according to your conscience."

For several moments after he ceased speaking, the room was as silent as the halls of death. No one stirred. No one seemed to breathe. The judge finally broke the charmed silence of the court.

"Do you wish to sum up?" he asked in a subdued tone, glancing toward me.

"I have nothing further to submit, your honor," I said simply. "I am willing to let the case go to the jury."

The judge glanced inquiringly toward the district attorney. As in duty bound, the latter rose and asked that the jury be instructed to cast aside all sentimental considerations and theories, and deal with the circumstances in the evidence as presented against the prisoner. He then sat down.

The judge's charge was fair to the prisoner and fair to the people. He asked the jury to consider the prisoner's story in connection with the evidence in the case. He pointed out that Throck's statement of the length of time he lay upon the floor was supported by the evidence of the doctors. He explained to them that their verdict meant the life or death of a human being. There were no two degrees of the crime. He was either guilty and deserved capital punishment, or was innocent and merited his freedom. Upon that point the jury alone must decide.

I knew what the verdict would be. Dr. Throck, in his masterful presentation of his case, had placed the jury upon their conscience, face to face with their God.

They dared not find him guilty.

In just thirty three minutes from the time they left the courtroom, they had filed back into their places.

The usual questions were asked. The spectators, who had remained spellbound through Dr. Throck's long narration, had not yet recovered from their stupefaction, and were hanging with breathless interest on every word that was uttered.

"Gentlemen of the jury," asked the clerk, "have you agreed upon a verdict?"

"We have," replied the foreman, rising.

"What is it?"

"We find the prisoner 'not guilty.'"

The deafening applause which rent the air showed upon which side the sympathy of those present had been at last enlisted. The court was unable to restore order, but a sudden hushed stillness fell upon the people as the sharp crack of a pistol rang through the room.

Impelled by some subtle instinct, Dr. Throck dashed over the railing, and parting the excited people with his muscular arms, reached the cause of the trouble—a little dark man, who had been lifted to a reclining posture on one of the benches near the door. Blood was flowing from a wound in his breast.

"He shot himself," somebody said.

He was still conscious, and looked up with a wan, sad smile as Dr. Throck approached.

"I waited to see you acquitted, Henry," he panted, for he was failing fast.

"My God, John, why did you do this?" Dr. Throck cried, as he bent tenderly over him.

The little man wound one arm around the doctor's neck, just as a tired child might lean upon a sturdier friend, and drew the doctor's face down close to his own.

"It is—best—that—I should follow—her, Henry. I—I—am glad—to die now. If——"

He never finished the sentence.

It was John Sater.

John J. Wall.

THE PRIZE OF THE MISSING GOLD MINE.

A tale of the ambitious father, the rich rival, the faithful maid, and the penniless lover—
The apparently hopeless task ambition set penury, and the strange factor which
played an important part in the outcome.

THERE was a pleasant sound of fiddle and guitars on this September night at the house of Don Albino Montoya, the *alcalde* of Los Majones, in the Mesilla Valley. Across the light that streamed from windows and open doorway passed and repassed the forms of graceful dancers, whirling in the Spanish waltz. Don Albino was giving the first *baile* of the season, and everybody was glad that the maize and grapes were ripe and the time of dancing had begun.

The tune came to an end, the musicians put down their guitars and fiddles while they rested, and some of the dancers crowded to the door to get a breath of cool air. An olive skinned beauty, with a gold filigree comb in her dusky hair, peered out into the darkness, then smiled, showing teeth dazzlingly white. She glided among the people gathered at the threshold, passed out upon the portal, and spoke to some one standing in the shadow of one of the great posts.

"Ah, Alejandro *mio*!" she said, and caught him by the hands. "Why do you stand there in the dark as if hiding? You have not been to see me or even let me know of your return. Is this as much as you care for me?" This with a pout of the lips and toss of the head wholly Spanish and witching.

It was a stalwart man, dressed in rough miner's clothes, whom she addressed. Now as he turned his head to the girl it could be seen that he was an American and young, with a handsome open face; but the expression on it was reckless, almost to desperation.

"A dance is no place for me, Lola," he said bitterly, though his look brightened at the girl's presence and speech. "I'm out of luck, and merry-making is for those who are fortunate and happy. But I came to the *portal* to have one look at you before I went away."

"Then did you fail in your last trip to the mountains?" she asked in a tone full of concern and sympathy.

"Came back with only the clothes I wore and my weapons," he answered. "The Indians got my outfit and only barely missed getting me. I hid from them two days in the brush, and then worked back to white settlements."

"Poor Alejandro," she murmured compassionately. "So you have nothing! And where are you staying?"

"Old Pablo Martínez gave me my supper. I only got here this evening. I shall find a place to sleep somewhere. There is always a roof for the stranger in Los Majones."

"And then what will you do? You will stay in Los Majones?"

"I must for a day or two. I can't get away. I shall hire out as a cowboy or freighter as soon as a chance offers. It's my only way to raise a stake."

"And as soon as you can you will go back to the mountains to look for mines. Oh, why will you not give up your wanderings and stay where there are people—some one—who cares for you? Here!"

"It's for love of you that I go, Lola. Your father, as you know, will never consent to our marriage till I have money—and my only chance for that is to find a mine. So I must keep on prospecting till I make or break. And it's break now, sure enough."

They were standing in the shadow of one of the great posts supporting the veranda. Lola glanced round from the corner of her eye and saw that a couple much engaged with each other were between them and the doorway. She put both hands to the young man's neck caressingly and lifted her face to his.

"Did you think of me away in the mountains?" she asked tenderly. Their lips were near together; the answer was inaudible, but his head bent down, so that the broad brim of his sombrero hid the gold filigree comb in her hair.

Within the hall the musicians were tuning their instruments, and the dancers were reassembling on the floor.

"Dolores! Where is Dolores?" called a voice from the hall. Its tone, deep and resonant, indicated the habit of command. It was the voice of Don Albino.

"Now I must go. Father is calling me and he must not find us together," whispered the girl. "When shall I see you again? Will you wait for me to come out another time? No? Tomorrow then. *Adios*. Are you quite sure that you love me, *caro mio*?"

Their lips met, then she turned swiftly, and, with a bright glow on her cheek, was walking demurely down the *portal* as her father appeared in the doorway. There was a look of satisfaction on his face, though he spoke to her impatiently.

"Where have you been so long?" he asked. "Everybody is waiting for you; Don Enrico and you are to lead the dance. And he has asked me tonight—but I will tell you that later. Go and join him now."

Lola passed swiftly through the hall, where the couples were ranged upon the floor and Don Enrico Gallego stood at the head of the set with a sulky look on his dark face. He did not fancy being kept waiting by any one, for he was the son of a rich family in Bernalillo County, and felt his importance. It was whispered among the guests that the handsome young *rico* had come to the *alcalde's* house in Los Majones for a bride, and it was easy to see that all were interested to observe how Lola behaved toward him.

After Lola had left him, Alexander Campthorne, lingering in the shadow of the pillar, watched her, through the window, take her place by the side of Don Enrico. The music struck up and the dance began. It was a pretty scene, the handsome girls, gay in flowered silks; the graceful, deferential,

bowing caballeros in somber black, interweaving, separating, swinging and turning in the figures of the always beautiful Spanish dance. But to the lone prospector, standing in the outer darkness, it brought memories, sadly contrasting with the present, of two years before, when, in luck, with money and good clothes to sport, he was a welcome guest at the house of the alcalde, who showed high approval of his attentions to Lola. Now in his poverty Don Albino gave him the coldest of cold shoulders, and did not invite him to his house, or even to drop in for a chat at his office. It was the way of the world, Campthorne knew, and he would not have minded it were it not for Lola. His misfortunes made no difference with her, to be sure—they drew her to him the more strongly—but with her father against him, and the cross old aunt, who acted most vigilantly as her duenna, it was difficult for him even to exchange a word with her in those bad days. And now here was Don Enrico, rich and handsome, favored both by father and aunt, with every chance to make his court to Lola. Who could say that she might not be badgered and commanded into a marriage with Don Enrico at last. It was with a heavy heart that Campthorne turned his back on the music and lights and went over to the modest home of Pablo Martinez, the teamster, where he knew he should be made welcome to the hospitality the house afforded, a pair of blankets and a place on the floor to sleep.

Merrily the dance went on, and Don Enrico was often the partner of Lola, who being of southern blood and feminine, with all her loyal love of Campthorne, could not help feeling flattered and pleased at the preference of the young *rico* who had found no girl in his own county to keep him from coming over to Los Majones to dance with her; and she knew what it meant—to ask her hand in marriage. By Mexican custom the real proposal, of course, would be made to her father, who would assume to settle the matter out of his own wisdom. But as a matter of courtesy Don Enrico would make a formal and elaborate proposal to her, with her aunt on guard in the background, so that she might have the pleasure of saying yes, in an affair already decided.

At supper Don Enrico sat opposite Lola at the head of the table, and the guests looked upon them as already an engaged couple. Later when the dance broke up and the guests had departed to their homes, or gone to the rooms assigned them in the alcalde's house, Don Albino called Lola into the reception room to inform her that Don Enrico had formally asked her hand in marriage.

"I have given my consent," he said. "Your aunt also approves. When does it please you that the wedding shall be? I wish to consider your wishes in the matter."

He looked at Lola as if having no doubt that his announcement would be received with blushes and delight. But there was an expression on his daughter's face that caused his own to take on a shade of stern surprise. Her cheek was pale as she answered him, but her words were plainly to be understood—and they were astonishing to a Mexican father's ears.

"But, father, I don't want to marry Don Enrico. Why should you talk of my appointing a wedding day, when I want none—not yet?"

"Why should you? Because I say so!" thundered Don Albino. It was a new thing to him to have his will or word withstood in his household, or elsewhere about Los Majones. "Silence! I will inform you when the marriage is to be after I have talked further with Don Enrico and your aunt."

Don Albino asserting his authority was not a pleasant person to withstand. But Lola, now very pale, answered her father, her eyes looking straight into his. Her cheek gained a spot of color as she spoke.

"I will not marry Don Enrico," she said. "I don't wish to marry any one now—and if I did, it should not be he!"

Perhaps it was fortunate that indignation for a few moments fairly choked Don Albino's speech. His inability to find words to fit the occasion, gave him time to reflect, and to note an expression in his daughter's eyes that reminded him of the way her mother had looked on certain rare occasions—her mother, who was of that imperious, hot blooded family, the Mondragons—when Don Albino had found that it saved trouble to yield his point without insistence. He saw that Lola in her present mood could not be made to marry Don Enrico by force of threats or authority, and he turned to sarcasm.

"Perhaps you refuse Don Enrico because you hope to marry a *gringo*; some worthless *Americano*, with no money or character, seeking a wealthy Spanish American wife. That Alejandro Camphorne perhaps, the unlucky prospector, who never finds anything but misfortune."

She turned her head slightly away, and smiled. Words could not have said, "You have named the man I love," more plainly, nor half so prettily. But she also spoke. "You were willing enough that he should marry me last year," she said. "You the same thing as promised it. It was only when he met with misfortune that you turned against him."

"You should never marry him with my consent," cried her father, astounded at her frank avowal. "I would rather see you dead!"

"Wait, and say no words that you will repent of," she said. "You will give your consent willingly some day. He will find his gold mine and be very rich, and then you will be proud of him for a son in law."

Don Albino lost patience again. "Go to bed, undutiful child!" he shouted angrily. "You will see what will come to pass tomorrow. Go to bed I say, and sleep may bring you to reason."

* * * * *

In the dawning of the next day Hechicera, the witch, wrinkled and weird, looked forth from the door of her house in the outskirts of Los Majones, and watched the flight of the birds. More than any other person in the whole *alcalderia* she was hated, feared, and consulted by people of all degrees. Many were the tales, told under the breath, lest she overhear and avenge the telling, of her dark doings abroad in guise of wolf or night bird, of her power of divination, and of her sinister art in bringing strange things to pass.

She looked to the east, the west, and the south, and laughed, as she watched the birds circling against the sky.

"Ha, ha, ha!" she croaked to herself. "Visitors today! A buzzard, a dove, and a raven—a rich man, a poor man, and a pretty girl in love. Which will come first?"

She turned from watching the birds in the sky. "It is the raven. The poor man comes first," she said. It was Alexander Camphorne that she saw, going past the house. In searching his pockets for tobacco he at that moment discovered a forgotten handful of coffee, where he had placed it on some occasion in his last prospecting trip. He saw the witch in the doorway.

"I'll give the coffee to the old woman," he said to himself, and turning, walked up to her. "*Buenas días, senora*," he said pleasantly, and, dropping the coffee into her hands, was turning to pass on. But she stopped him.

"How do you get on with your courtship of the *Senorita Lola*?" she asked.

Camphorne looked blankly at her as if wondering what she could know or care about the matter. But he answered bluntly:

"Mighty bad! Like all the rest of my affairs! That is," he added, "it isn't the *senorita*. It's her father and aunt, and that fellow from Bernalillo. The whole crowd are bucking against me, and it looks as if between 'em they'd raise me out of the game."

"Let me tell you something, *caballero*," said Hecllicera wisely. "Her father is more friendly to you than you think. Heed my words. He is going to send you out into the mountains to find the Cincha Larga mine. You must find it, and come back and marry *Lola*."

"That would be fine, if only it could be done as easy as saying it. But people have been hunting for the old mine for two hundred years, and no one has found it yet."

"Somebody found it once," she said. "And what has been done may be done again. Be advised by me. Take what Don Albino offers you and go before he changes his mind. You have no time to lose before the winter snows set in to drive you out of the mountains."

Camphorne considered her words a minute; then turned to go.

"If it be as you say, and Don Albino really offers to outfit me," he said, "I will start today. *Adios, senora*."

On quitting the witch's house he took his way to the plaza to find out what new things were awaiting him there.

At the *alcalde's* house breakfast had been eaten, and Don Albino was at the end of an important conversation with his daughter.

"I will send this *Americano*, Alejandro, into the mountains to find the Cincha Larga mine," he said. "He shall have until the winter to do it in. If he finds it you shall have my permission to marry him, and you both shall share this house with me. But if on the first day of December he has not come back with proof that he has found it, your engagement with Don Enrico shall be announced that day, and the marriage shall take place on Christmas. Is it fairly understood between us?"

"Oh, he'll be sure to find it," said Lola confidently, as if the discovering of the Cincha Larga was the most commonplace thing in the world for Alejandro to do.

"So you agree to my terms?" said the don. "There must be no shifting about in the matter."

"Yes," said Lola, "I agree."

She went to her chamber and sat by the window to watch for Campthorne so as to be the first to tell him the good news that he had only to go and find the old Spanish mine before December, and then come back to marry her. Don Albino sat smiling in high satisfaction at the way he had got the best of the young lovers with the impossible condition about the Cincha Larga. For to search for that historic mine was in the estimation of people in general in that region about as practicable as to hunt for the pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow.

Not but that the mine was, or had been, somewhere in the mountains to the west; and from it, by common report, the Spaniards, centuries before, had taken millions of treasure in gold. When near the end of the seventeenth century the Pueblo Indians rose in revolt against their Spanish oppressors and drove them out of New Mexico, they obliterated, or concealed past finding, the mines they had worked in as slaves, the Cincha Larga with the others. When the Spaniards came back, at last, to possess the country again, try as they might, they could not rediscover the Cincha Larga mine. So many searchers lost their lives in the attempt, through exposure, accidents, and Apache arrows, that the superstition became prevalent that the mine had been laid under enchantment, and that the discoverer of it would perish on the spot. In sending Campthorne out to find it, Don Albino felt that he was playing a sure game with his daughter and her American lover, in which the man of his own choice, Don Enrico, would come in for the prize at the end.

Aunt Eloisa took good care that Lola should get no chance to speak with Campthorne that morning. Instead, when he came into the plaza, Don Albino, standing at the door of his store, greeted him pleasantly, for the first time in many months, invited him to his office and a cigar, and, by degrees, opened the subject of his going out to search for the Cincha Larga, which undertaking he presented in the light of a hopeful project. The climax of the interview came when Don Albino produced from his safe a remarkable mine specimen. It was a piece of quartz of a peculiar, clouded tint. It had been broken apart but was held together by strands of wire gold, and its surface, without and within the fracture, was spangled with gold specks and nuggets.

"This," said the don, "was taken, more than two hundred years ago, from the Cincha Larga mine. It was preserved through all the years that followed in a Franciscan mission, until it was given me by a Franciscan father. The man who brings me from the mine he discovers a specimen to match this, I should be proud to call my son-in-law."

The end of this conversation was that Campthorne went to the clerk of the *tienda* with authority from Don Albino to select such supplies as he deemed necessary for a three months' trip into the mountains; and, in an hour, there were piled up on the floor the sides of bacon, sacks of flour, coffee and sugar, the repeating rifle, pick, shovel, coffee pot, and frying pan, that

are indispensable elements in the prospector's outfit. "When you come round in the afternoon to make your start," said Don Albino, "my *mayordomo*, Manuel, will have a mule ready for you, and help you pack him."

Campthorne hung round the plaza in hopes of meeting Lola, but her father or aunt was ever in the way, and he had to content himself with the smile the *alcalde's* daughter gave him from behind a grated window. But a maid brought a little note telling the agreement her father had exacted of her, and that he must be back, without fail, on the first day of December, with the Cincha Larga mine discovered. When in the afternoon he came to the *tienda* to pack for his start none of the people of the great house was anywhere to be seen, but Manuel was awaiting him.

"I am here, *senor*," said Manuel, "to help you to pack your mule which stands in the corral. Here is the saddle, the packing cloth, and the rope. Don Albino's generosity has anticipated everything."

Upon the good qualities of his pack animal rests much of the chances of the prospector's success, so by a natural impulse Campthorne went at once to the door opening upon the corral to see the animal which was to share the toils and hardships of his trip. In the middle of the corral, with lopping ears and listless tail, stood an aged mule that he had often seen, unclaimed and untended, picking up its living in the outskirts of the town. The yellowish brown color, which had gained it its name, *Mulato*, was faded and grey with age, and he was aware that for years the creature has been looked upon as past service.

"Where is the mule I am to have?" asked Campthorne.

"There he stands," said Manuel. "A noble steed! Of exalted Andalusian strain, he has the sedateness that comes with years and experience. Ah, it is no young and untrained beast that Don Albino has put at your service." And he looked at the prospector as if he expected him rapturously to endorse his praise.

Campthorne's first thought was that a mistake had been made. Then the suspicion that he was being tricked made him hot and angry.

"Do you mean to tell me," he asked, as soon as he could trust his voice to speak, "that this bag of bones—this mule that was old when Don Albino was in *pinafiores*—is what he has given me to pack three months' supplies into the mountains?"

"It is the beast I deliver to you by his direction to me," said Manuel.

"Where is Don Albino?" demanded Campthorne hotly. "I'll see what he has to say to me about the matter!"

"I am sorry, but he is not at home," replied the *mayordomo*. "He started in his carriage for the Albuquerque two hours ago. With him went the *senora* Eloisa and the *senorita* Dolores. The *Senor* Don Enrico Gallego accompanies the party, which is now full five leagues on its way."

Campthorne swore under his breath, but he took time to think before he spoke aloud. Was he, a broken and penniless man, to pick and choose; to look Don Albino's gift mule in the mouth? Hechicera's advice came to his mind, and without a word he set to work with Manuel to pack his equipment on the mule. As he went about the task, adjusting the pack, he noted

the naturally fine points of the animal, which plainly had been a remarkable beast in its day; and before the packing was completed he began to think better of his chances to get some good service out of the old mule.

"Mulato has stuff in him yet for the work you have to do," said the *mayordomo*, as Campthorne started away. "It was the mule of Pedro Sanchez, and there was no animal in the Mesilla Valley to compare with Mulato in his day. Pedro was a strange man. He would go into the mountains, no one could ever find out where, and, after staying away for months, would come back bringing his buckskin bags filled with gold dust and lumps of yellow gold. *Caramba!* It was fine times for the keepers of the *fondas* and the monte tables when he came in from his trips. But Pedro went into the mountains one time too many and did not come back. Years afterwards, in a fight with the Apaches, our people recaptured his mule, old Mulato here, so it was pretty certain what had been the fate of Pedro. That was sad - and what was sadder still, the secret of where he found his gold perished with him. Well, *senor*, good luck go with you. Favor the old mule for a few days till he gets the stiffness out of his joints, and his performance will surprise you. *Adios, senor.*"

Campthorne said good by to the *mayordomo*, and, with old Mulato limping stiffly after him, turned his back to the plaza and set out to find his fortune, with Lola as the prize of his success.

* * * * *

Campthorne had decided that his best chance of success lay in prospecting the Diablo Range, the rough mountain chain where the Gila River has its rise. The Diablos he knew had not been often visited by white men owing to their forbidding aspect, the superstitious fears of the Mexicans, and the fact that they were noted as a lurking place for Apaches. So Campthorne, careless of risks, pushed out boldly towards this wild range, thinking of it only as a promising field for new discoveries. He did not expect to find the Cincha Larga mine, which he was inclined to regard as a myth—but he hoped to discover a lead of such richness that the exhibition of specimens from it would knock down the opposition to him in the house of Don Albino Montoya.

He traveled slowly at first so as to favor Mulato, and he perceived with pleasure that the old mule held up well under his burden, and moved along with brisker step day by day. He passed the Mimbres Mountains, crossed the dry plain beyond, and one week from the time he started, had entered the gloomy, pine grown defiles of the Devil's Range and found himself once more on likely prospecting ground. Then his search for signs of gold and silver began, and he worked early and late, to little avail. Up hill and down dale he traveled, threading canyons and crossing ridges, but never a promising lead could he find. Patiently he scanned the cliffs, hunted for fragments of mineral rock at the foot of slopes, and followed "float" up steep mountain sides, but it all led to nothing. He kept tally of the days that passed by cutting a notch each day in a stick, and he saw the notches grow to sevens, and then to thirties, until with but few days left of the time allotted him, he found himself no better off than at the beginning.

At last when the notches in his stick showed but ten days more to come in November—and he knew that seven of these marked the least time that would be required in getting back to Los Majones, Campthorne came to a region of the mountains wilder and more forbidding than anything he had encountered before. "It's my last chance," he said as he set to work. "I'll look around here for a day or two, and that'll leave me just time and grub enough to take me back to white settlements. If my luck still holds bad I'll not show up in Los Majones again, but go somewhere where I'm not known, and change my name and business." But his heart was heavy and something choked his throat at the thought of losing Lola. He must throw his depression off or it would unnerve him.

"Say, old fellow," he called to the mule, "what's got into you any way? You're bent on taking your own head today. This is the third time you've started off without orders."

The old mule was showing a strange excitement. His ears moved briskly to and fro, and he manifested a constant disposition to push on ahead of his master up the canyon which Campthorne was exploring. At last, just as night was shutting down, Campthorne turned from chipping at a ledge half way up the side of the canyon to find that Mulato had disappeared in the darkness. The sound of the mule's steps, still faintly heard, told that he had gone up the canyon and the prospector started after him on the run. But before he could overtake the mule the sound of the unshod hoofs seemed to be coming from somewhere overhead and, looking up, he saw Mulato's tawny form faintly outlined against the mountain side to the right. With steady pace the mule was moving diagonally upward along the face of an almost perpendicular cliff, where it seemed that only a fly could walk.

Campthorne peered along the canyon side, trying to search out the path by which the mule had ascended, and presently found it to be a narrow shelf winding upward along the mountain face. It was narrow—so perilously narrow that Campthorne in working his way along it had to hug the cliff to keep his footing—but he knew that he could go where a mule with his pack had gone. The shelf ended at the mouth of a deep ravine cutting through the mountain top, and as he turned up the gorge the moon rising above the mountains showed the mule well in advance just climbing out of the ravine near its head.

This was only the beginning of the chase that Mulato led his master that night. Round mountain sides, skirting the brinks of precipices with no room to spare, up and down steep ascents and descents, the mule kept its pace unwearied. Time and again Campthorne threw himself to the ground breathless and exhausted, but as wind and strength came back to him he rose to his feet and kept on after Mulato, tracing him sometimes by the sound of his feet, and sometimes by sight as the beast and his burden came into view moving along some ridge against the sky. It did not take Campthorne long to discover by the "feel" beneath his feet, and the glimpses that the moonlight gave him, that the mule was following an old path, which clearly he had traveled before.

At last as the mule appeared for a moment, phantom-like against the sky upon a crest ahead, then passed out of sight, Campthorne resolved to give up the chase. "I'll go as far as the place where I saw him last," he thought. "Then if he hasn't stopped, I'll pull up and wait till daylight."

He toiled to the summit, and saw beyond it a narrow, rock walled valley. In this the mule had stopped and was grazing as placidly as if the long chase he had led his master was merely a grace before supper. Campthorne went down into the valley, took the pack from the Mulato, and picketed him out to feed. Then he dropped down, dead tired, to the ground and rolled in his blankets, slept like a log until daybreak.

His first care on waking was to satisfy himself that Mulato was there all right; then he looked about him to see what kind of place he had fallen upon. The valley was completely inclosed by cliffs except for the narrow opening at its foot by which he had entered it the previous night. Through this opening led an old path. Campthorne got his breakfast, and then went to fetch Mulato to pack him for the start. The mule had pulled up his picket pin in the night and now was standing behind a large rock near the valley side. On turning the rock to drive the mule toward the place where the pack lay Campthorne started back at the sight that met his eyes. It was the skeleton of a man, stretched upon the ground; and among the fleshless bones were the heads and broken shafts of three Apache arrows. The mule stood as if on guard over the skeleton and instinctively Campthorne knew that the bones before him were the bones of Pedro Sauchez.

The arrows told plainly what the fate of the Mexican had been. Campthorne wondered what attraction had brought the old mine seeker to this spot. His eyes scanned the ground and the cliffs, but not a sign could he find of mineral, or that any man had ever searched there before him. He looked at his "time stick" with only nine more notches to make in it before December should have come. He had not a day to spare if he were to return on time to Los Majones.

"This is Last Hope Valley," he said disconsolately. "Here ends my prospecting, and comes my farewell to Lola. I'll not go back to Los Majones to be invited to Don Enrico's wedding. So here's for white settlements and a new start in life!"

He set to work to pack his mule, but when all was ready for the start the thought recurred to him of the lonely, unburied skeleton.

"It won't take long to tuck him under ground," he told himself. "It's the right thing to do, especially as I came here with Pedro's mule."

With his pick and shovel he went to the place where the bones lay and looked about for a place to make the grave. He chose a smooth slope at the foot of the cliff and began with his spade to loosen the earth. After a few strokes the point of the pick, sinking more deeply, fell upon something solid that was not earth or stone. He gave another blow—it was unmistakably wood that he struck. With his shovel he cleared away the loosened earth and saw that he had come upon a platform of squared timbers.

Campthorne did not stop to speculate upon his strange discovery, but worked with a will to clear the earth from above the timbers. In an hour's

time he had uncovered enough of the platform to bring completely into view a trap door, two feet square, built like the rest of the structure, of solid timbers. By the heavy iron ring in the center, he lifted the door from its place, revealing a dark, well-like hole going down to unseen depths. From it uprose the damp chill of a large underground excavation. The top of a notched pole rested against the casing, and, raising the pole and poking about with it, Campthorne found that its foot rested on a solid bottom, twenty five feet below.

From a dead piñon pine Campthorne broke off an armful of branches, dry and resinous, to serve as torches, dropped them into the shaft and climbed down the notched pole to the foot. By the light of his torch he looked about him. From the bottom of the shaft a gallery, between two walls of hard rock, led under the cliff that bounded the valley on that side. This gallery he followed for a distance of several hundred feet from the shaft to where it ended, against a face of such ore as prospectors dream of but have rarely seen. It was a decomposed quartz stuffed with nuggets and fine gold which gleamed yellow in the light of the torch. He broke off a fragment of quartz with his hammer, but it still held to the main mass by the wires of gold that threaded it, and he recognized in the color of the rock the characteristic tint of the specimen that Don Albino had shown him.

Campthorne dropped his torch and leaned for a few minutes against the side of the gallery to compose himself lest he go wild with joy in the dawn of his fortune—for he knew that he had found the Cincha Larga mine.

On the floor of the gallery, against the face of the vein, was a pile of the precious ore lying as old Pedro Sanchez had left it, twenty years before, on going forth from the mine for the last time. Campthorne climbed out of the shaft, got two stout canvas bags from his pack, came back and filled them with choice specimens from the ore heap. These he brought out of the mine, one at a time up the notched ladder. Then he shut down the trap door, covered the platform with earth as it had been covered before, and was ready now to start for Los Majones.

But first he dug a grave and in it laid the bones of Pedro Sanchez; and he made two crosses of pine branches and stuck one at the head and the other at the foot of the grave. Then with the two sacks of ore safely packed, he and Mulato started out of the valley; and when they had passed through the opening he let the old mule take his head, for he knew that he would pick the shortest route to Los Majones. Mulato knew well the road over which in years long past he had borne many a load of Cincha Larga ore, and now, homeward bound, his feet moved so nimbly that nightfall found him and his master clear of the Diablos. Over the plain, through the Mimbres Mountains, and across another plain to the eastward Campthorne kept his way, notching his stick day by day, and hoping that he had not dropped a notch in his reckoning.

He had cut the last notch in the morning of the day which, at dusk, found him and Mulato trudging into the outskirts of Los Majones. There were lights in the houses and the fires glowed cheerfully in the round, out of door ovens where the poorer Mexicans were cooking their suppers. Campthorne

came opposite Hechicera's house, and at his halloo the witch appeared at the door. He asked her if all was well at the house of Senor Montoya.

"Hechicera," he said, "I have found the Cincha Larga."

"You come in a good time," she said. "Don Enrico Gallego is here to claim the senorita. It is said that their marriage is arranged for Christmas, and the announcement will be made tomorrow. Don Albino will be surprised to see you. It has been said by some that you were killed by Indians, and few besides Lola believed that you would ever return."

Campthorne bade the witch good night rather hastily, passed on to the plaza, and entering Don Albino's court yard, halted his mule before the door and knocked. The *mayordomo* appeared at the door, and he had to look a second time before he recognized the young prospector, with his beard of ten weeks' growth, and rough garments, sadly the worse for wear.

"Oh, so you are back," said Manuel, greeting Campthorne not over cordially. "The people will be surprised to see you. Your pleasure, senor?"

"I wish to see Don Albino at once," said Campthorne shortly. He meant to waste no time in making his position known.

"He is much engaged," said the *mayordomo*. "He is transacting business of importance with Don Enrico Gallego. Tomorrow——"

"I must see Don Albino now," said Campthorne, and his tone made the *mayordomo* start. "I have things to take from my mule. Lend a hand, *hombre*."

But the *mayordomo* stood still, shaking his head; so Campthorne cast loose the end of the packing rope, unwound its lashings from the mule, and dumped the pack down before the door. He put one of the canvas sacks of ore upon Manuel's shoulder.

"Carry that, *hombre*," he said, and lifted the other sack to his own shoulder. "Now show me the way to the *alcalde*. Is he in the dining room?"

"Yes, senor, but——"

"All right, I know the way." Followed by Manuel, quaking beneath his load, Campthorne strode to the dining room, gave a thundering knock at the door, and, without waiting for an invitation to enter, pushed it open. Don Albino Montoya and Don Enrico Gallego were seated at the supper table with a bottle of Rio Grande wine between them. Don Albino rose from his seat frowning, but, unheeding his indignation, Campthorne set his sack of ore upon the table, and motioned to the *mayordomo* to do likewise with the one he carried. He opened the sack, and emptied from it a half peck of ore upon the table.

"Don Albino Montoya," he said with dignity, "will you favor me by bringing your specimen of Cincha Larga ore."

Influenced by the sight of the ore, and, still more by Campthorne's manner, Don Albino's black look became infused with interest and repressed curiosity. He bowed to Don Enrico, said "Excuse me, senor," and went from the room. Soon he returned with a parcel in his hand, and unrolled from its buckskin wrapper his precious specimen.

"Senor Montoya," said Campthorne, "do me the honor to compare your specimen with these I have brought." In hushed suspense, with every face

present fixed in eager interest, Don Albino lifted one by one the pieces that Camphorne had turned upon the table, weighed each one in his hand, and compared it with his own specimen. "They're all alike," said Camphorne, and emptied the sack upon the table. Dumfounded, Don Albino laid his specimen down and gazed at the young prospector in marvel unbounded.

"It is ore of the Cincha Larga," he said in awe stricken tones.

"It is ore of the Cincha Larga," said Camphorne. "I took it eight days ago from the mine."

Don Albino opened his arms, caught Camphorne to his heart, and kissed him on both cheeks after the fashion of the country.

"Senor Don Alejandro Camphorne," he said fervently, "by the grace of the saints you have achieved a miracle, and restored to Christian hauds the marvelous mine coucealed by the old pagans. My son, again I embrace you."

He released the young man and turned to gaze again enraptured upon the golden ore. "You have done your part of the agreement," he said. "I am proud to fulfil mine, and to say that you have my full permission——"

Then while Camphorne looked impatient, and Don Enrico sulky and angry, a quick step, a rustle of silk, and a little cry of joy, came through the doorway behind Camphorne, a pair of arms were flung about his neck, and Lola ended her father's words with a kiss and whisper: "To marry me."

"I am grieved beyond measure, Don Enrico, at your disappointment—our disappointment, I may say," said Don Albino, alone with the disconsolate *rico*, a little later. "But my word is passed and must be kept. Who could have foreseen that it would be an *Americano* who should find the golden mine. Alas, that I have not another daughter for one so loved and worthy as you!" And he looked as sorrowful and regretful as a man who loves money can look, whose son in law to be has just discovered the richest gold mine in all the southwest.

Don Enrico started back for Bernalillo that night. Camphorne and Lola were married at Christmas with feasting and dancing, and grandees from half the territory over were at the wedding. They are happy and rich, and Don Albino Montoya, as his daughter once prophesied would come to pass, is vastly proud of his son in law, the finder of the famous mine that baffled search for centuries.

Clarence Pullen.

TO DOLLY, ANGRY.

'Tis said when women angry grow
 (To tell you is my duty)
 That all the faults they have they show,
 And that it spoils their beauty;
 But you, I see, lose not a charm,
 Although your temper's bad, miss;
 For though you're pretty when you're calm,
 You're also pretty mad, miss!

Vincent F. Howard.

THE PHANTOM ARMY.*

Being the story of a man and a mystery—How a startling change of environment came to a bankrupt Englishman—From a London garret to the White Hussars of the mountains in Spain and an army whose service is against the world.

CHAPTER I.—A WOMAN STANDING IN THE STREET.

A STREET of Bayswater ; an interminable street ; the hour, two o'clock of the morning ; the month, June, the year 1893. And in the silence of this street, a woman crying for help.

There had been a lull of the breeze when first I heard the cry, but now the gust came again to blow my cape about my ears and to send me cringing to the doorstep of a house for shelter. For a moment, the gas lamps went black before the blast ; leaves and paper were whirled almost to the upper windows of the houses ; a hurricane raged and the woman's voice was lost in it. But at the ebb of the wind, I heard the cry for the second time and, in the same instant, saw the woman standing at the open door of a house upon the opposite side of the way. It was plain to me at the first that she was greatly agitated and in deep distress, for she turned often to look, now up and down the street, now into the dark hall behind her. Once, indeed, she raised her voice to a high pitch, crying " Help, help ! "—but immediately upon this she returned to the hall, and when I crossed over to the house the door was already shut and all was silence.

The average man returning from a dance at two o'clock of a summer's morning, does not look to be brought face to face with a tragedy by the way. For myself, who could make no claim to the unexpected mind of the average man—as you shall learn presently—I had long given up hope that so much as one adventure worth recording is to be encountered in prosaic London. Births, marriages, and deaths, the wrangles of the pot house, the scandals of the palaces—these can London give in abundance. But beyond them, what a life of repetitions it is—the same vulgar tragedies and comedies, the same weary players, the same dust begrimed scenes. Until that morning of June, now four years ago, I had never recorded in all my years one moment when I could honestly say, here is a happening of which the bookmen love to write. Yet had I known it, that woman's cry coming to me out of the silence of the woebegone street was a call from the house of my destiny ; a call which should send me forth from my own country to hear and see the terrible things of which I now would write—a call from God, it may be, to a man at fortune's ebb, to him who had been ready but yesterday to cry, " I have lived my life ! "

I crossed over to the house, I say, and stood wondering before it. In

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outward shape as the other dwellings about, a Georgian monument to artistic imbecility, it was unlighted as its fellows; silent as they were silent, gaunt as they were gaunt, a tower of ugliness to harbor the willing sleepers who lived in the damnable street. Save for a faint glow of light shining upon the ceiling of the hall—as you could observe through the skylight of the front door—there was no indication whatever that man or woman moved in that abode of gloom. And yet I had seen a woman come out of it, had heard her cry for help, had watched her look up and down the street as though seeking a friend and ally of the night. Even the momentary glimpse I had of her permitted me to notice that she was dressed beyond the ordinary—a woman of majestic height, and, I felt instinctively, a young woman, for such her voice proclaimed her.

Never was there a mystery so unlooked for, so inexplicable. I listened long for any sound in the house—a moan of the wind answered me. I looked down the terrible street—its pavements glistened still with the rain of the earlier hours, but no living being trod them. Curiosity rooted me to the spot. I had the impulse to knock at the door and ask the woman if I could be of service to her. It may be that I should not have brought my courage to that point; that I should have lighted another cigar and gone at length to my own house with curiosity still high strung. Those are questions I need not answer, for I had been but a couple of minutes before the house when the door was opened for the second time, and the woman ran out almost into my arms.

She wore a dress of gray silk with red at the shoulders—a gown that had the stamp of Paris and not of Bayswater upon it. Jewels glittered upon her pretty white neck and a tiara of diamonds flashed in the curls of her jet black hair. My surmise as to her height was confirmed when I found that she stood well above my shoulder—the shoulder of Noel Falconer, whom brother officers in the hussars used to call “length without breath.” But of her face I could see nothing, for little white hands covered it and checked the sobs which shook her. That her distress was deep rooted I had no manner of doubt. Yet how she came there, dressed like that, at such an hour of morning, I knew no more than the dead.

“Madam,” I said, stepping out of the shadows suddenly, “you seem to be in some trouble——”

She did not notice me upon the instant; but I heard her say again and again in French which had the charm of a Southern accent:

“Oh, my God! my God! they have killed him.”

I touched her upon the arm, for there was that in her voice which won my pity.

“Madam,” I said, “you are ill and have no business to be standing here. Even I am cold, and I wear a thick coat——”

She looked up at the words, and observed me for the first time. A more stately or noble creature I had never seen in all my life. And her voice did not lie to me. The warm light of youth shone in her brilliant eyes, was painted upon her pretty lips and flushing face. I thought, then, that she was an Austrian, for nowhere out of Vienna had I come upon one who stood so

well for all the dignity and grace of womanhood. In this I was wrong, as you shall see ; but I did not know that I was wrong until many days had passed and I had seen strange cities and strange men.

"Let me implore you to return to your house," I continued, while she stood shivering and watching me with curious eyes ; "if I can be of any service there, do not hesitate to ask me. My name is Noel Falconer, and I was an officer of the Tenth Hussars three months ago. You are a stranger, I see, but you will find my arm stronger than my French if you have need of it."

Not until this moment, I am sure, did she awake to the fact that she stood in the street without cloak or hat, and that a stranger talked with her. But now, swiftly, my words recalled her to the truth, and she turned to me imploringly.

"Monsieur," she said in a low and gentle voice, "a very great crime has been committed in that house tonight. I have no right to ask you, but will you go in with me ? There is one dead there and I cannot go alone."

I stepped back a pace and looked at her. For an instant I thought that she was jesting with me, but the heaving bosom, the tears still upon her cheek, the quivering mouth gave the lie to such a thought.

"Madam," I exclaimed, "you may count upon me in all things. I am ready to come with you now. Perhaps you would not wish others to know of this?"

"Yes, yes," she exclaimed, a spasm as of fear passing over her troubled face, "I do not wish that. They must know nothing ; you will not tell them—you are a gentleman and will not speak of these things."

I protested that her secret should be well kept and was reiterating the promise when a footstep echoing in the distance cut short my words. She heard it too and taking my hand timidly and with the air of one who feared to go alone, she drew me into the hall of the house and closed the door softly behind us. I have been in many a situation of peril in my adventurous life ; but never, I think, did such a sense of hidden danger take possession of me as at that moment when the street door of the unknown woman's house closed upon us, and we were face to face God knew with what tragedy or terrible deed of the night. The silence, the hour, the suggestion of some dreadful mystery, the strange manner of the woman's appearance in the street, the words I had heard from her lips and had regarded until this time as the ravings of hysteria—all these were at war with nerves shaken by long months of misfortune and of trouble. I shuddered to remember that she had spoken of a dead man being in the house. An overwrought and weary brain so played with me that if a hand had been stretched out from the darkness of the hall to touch me, I believe I had cried out as a child in the terror of a dream.

These things I recall now with some little shame. Courage is much a matter of circumstance, and circumstance has been so strange a friend to me that I disguise nothing of my first meeting with one who changed the course of my life at an hour when life seemed to have no other gift for me. And it was odd, I vow, that within ten minutes of my first meeting with Isabella

de Gavarnie we should have come together to the hall of a house in Bayswater, hand in hand as children upon a quest—the man, it may be, more terrified than the woman, yet both in their hearts fearing that the darkness was the shield of some momentous mystery from which the light would send them trembling presently.

It was a large hall, wide and lofty, and giving upon a staircase of finer proportions than I had looked for in such a house. A glimmer of gas upon the landing showed me many pictures in heavy frames, and a show of swords which caught the feeble rays and made dulled mirrors of them. But the hall itself was in darkness, and such gray light of a summer's night as the street vouchsafed was here lost to us. I could scarce see the face of the woman; could distinguish nothing of my surroundings, though the soft carpet beneath my feet spoke of luxury and of wealth. In all that great house no sound, save the ticking of a clock and the deep breathing of the woman, whose hot hand touched my own, was to be heard. If a tragedy had been played, assuredly the actors now rested. Yet where should we look for them—where lay the body of him she had spoken of? God be my witness, so scared was I that the thought of stumbling upon the dead man in the darkness of the hall froze my very heart.

"Do you wish me to enter one of these rooms with you?" I asked in a deep whisper while the woman stood fear stricken and irresolute. "Was it here that it happened?"

"Yes, yes, here," she answered quickly, dragging me of a sudden towards a door upon my left hand. "I returned from South Audley Street at half past one and heard them quarreling—my brother and his friend. It happened then—oh, God help me, what shall I do?"

My hand was upon the knob when she spoke. I felt her instinctive gesture which would have dragged me back from the place as from the scene of dreadful sights. But at the mention of a quarrel—a human thing at the worst—I took heart and began to remember that they had called me the strongest man in my regiment. After all, if there were but one other in the house, I could very well take the risk of a meeting with him. Yet I would have given much to have had a revolver in my hand; and when I threw open the door of the room and saw that it was in darkness, my courage went trickling away like water from a cracked jar.

"Madam," I said, standing suddenly and facing her, "how many are in this house with you?"

She listened a moment before answering, as though some sound would give her words.

"Except my servants, there are none," she whispered presently; "I cannot—I dare not speak to them. And I have no right to ask you——"

"You have a woman's right, which is the best right," I said, feeling in my pocket for a match; "if you will remain here a moment I will see what this room has to tell us."

"You must not go alone," she protested, but I loosed her hand and left her standing, a pitiful figure of fear and distress, in the gloomy light of the alcove. The wan and feeble rays of the wax match aggravated the darkness

of the great room into which I now stepped. For an instant I caught sight of my own face, white and hollow eyed, in a mirror above a buffet, and that gave me such a start that I dropped the match, and was in darkness again.

"What is it? What do you see?" she asked from her place at the door.

"I see my own face," said I, with the poorest attempt possible to conceal from her my dread of the room and of that which I believed it to contain.

"You have another match?" she exclaimed in a whisper, which betrayed her impatience.

"I have a boxful," said I, and with that I struck a light for the second time and held it up that I might discover the chandelier. But there was a draft, as from an open window, in the place and my second match dropped reddening upon the carpet, leaving me with a momentary vision of a table set for supper and of glasses overturned upon it. I know not what mad instinct set me thinking it, but as my fingers fumbled for yet another light, I had the thought that the body of the dead man might be at my very feet. And at that, my hand was clumsy as the fingers of one bitten by the cold. Nor could the woman's distress quicken me or make me forget the horrid thought.

"Oh," she repeated, "what is it? What do you see? Why do you not light the gas?"

I suppressed a word of impatience, and at the third attempt obtained a flaming match. The chandelier now showed itself hanging low over the table, and I picked my way to it dreading every step when it carried my foot to the ground. Not until five burners were lighted and a brilliant aureola cut a circle of radiance from the shadows did I breathe a full breath in that place of mystery.

The room was a large one, furnished in the Chippendale style. The pictures, as well as I could see them beyond the aureola, were of the Spanish school. There was a heavy mirror, in a black oak frame, above the fireplace; a second mirror hung above the buffet. Two chairs, I observed, had been drawn to the table, but one of them was overturned. A stain of red wine had run over the white cloth and dropped upon the chair beneath. A candle in a silver stick was broken in half as though by a blow. Trivial as these things were, they confirmed the woman's story strikingly. It was plain that there had been a brawl in the room; but what of the brawlers? Certainly, in that space which the circle of light covered, there was no sign of life or of the end of life. But beyond, in the shadows? I passed swiftly round the room, warmed to courage by the friendly gas. The matches no longer fell from my clumsy fingers. There was no nook or cranny into which I did not peer.

"Madam," I said at last, and it was a word of vast relief, "you may come in—there is no one here."

She entered with noiseless steps, and the light falling upon the superb jewels in her hair and about her neck, gave a changing radiance of fire to them so that her lightest movement was a glitter anew of sparkling gems. When she stood at my side and searched the room with her dark eyes, now aflame with curiosity, she seemed to me to be some queen of the east come

masquerading to this suburb of London ; yet from what city or upon what errand I could not so much as surmise. Nevertheless I was sure of two things at the start of it—she was an aristocrat—and her jewels were the finest I had ever seen on woman.

"There is no one here," I repeated, resisting the temptation to stare at her. "I have looked everywhere and am sure of it."

She drew a deep breath and appeared to be thinking. Presently, she turned to the buffet and her quick eyes detected that which I had not seen there. It was a handkerchief stained with blood. She held it for a moment in her shapely hand which quivered as a leaf that is to fall.

"My God!" she exclaimed, while all the color rushed from her face, "what has happened, where are they—why do I suffer like this?"

I thought that she would have swooned and put my arm about her, but she drew back from me and turned again toward the hall.

"Monsieur," she said in a quick and nervous tone which betrayed an agony of doubt, "will you search the other rooms with me? I do not know what it is—I cannot tell you—but this house has a great secret to give up to us, and I am alone. Oh, I have no right to ask you, no right to claim your kindness!"

She stood expectant, an exquisite figure in the circle of the light. Mystified as I was, afraid of the dreadful secret of that house of mysteries, I yet could say to myself that here was a woman whom I would follow to the world's end.

"Madam," I said, "there is no question of right. I shall not soon forget the privilege."

"Nor I the service," she answered, but with such meaning in her tone that I stopped an instant in my walk, and our eyes met. Ever afterwards the thought has been with me that Isabella de Gavarnie became my friend in that moment.

"Shall we begin on this floor?" I asked, as we stood once more in the darkness of the hall.

"If you please," she said quietly, and with that I struck another match and threw open the door of a room upon my right hand—a library, as I could see, but empty as the other room. The drawn blinds showed a glimmer of the morning light without; paper and pens littered upon a bureau spoke of the occupations of the dead day; a book lay upon a little table, and an empty coffee cup stood beside it. But this was a room of repose. A child could have seen that there had been no brawl there.

"We waste our time here," I said, shutting the door of the library behind me. "Have you any reason to believe that your friends are still in the house?"

She held up the blood stained handkerchief which she had carried from the dining room with them.

"I know that they are here—one of them," she exclaimed impatiently; "yet if you wish to go, monsieur——"

"I wish to go where you tell me," I answered.

"Then we will look in the drawing room."

It was dark upon the staircase, but a great stained glass window shimmered at the first touch of day, and the gas jet, which we turned up as we ascended, shone white and feeble before the light of dawn. The woman had not waited while I fumbled with the gas, and stood already upon the second landing when I was ready to follow her. I hastened up the remaining stairs, fearing for her to go alone; but three steps still lay between us when she uttered a cry of distress, and I saw her drop upon one knee and cover her eyes as though to shut from them the secret which was a secret no more. And then I knew that the whole of her story was true, for a man lay full length upon the floor, and whether he were alive or dead I had yet to learn.

He was a young man, short in stature as I imagined, and wearing the pointed beard beloved of the old Spanish painters. I noticed that he wore a great white bow in the place of our narrow English neckties; but his dress clothes seemed to be very new and his embroidered shirt front was scarcely ruffled. That he had been struck down in that place, was my first thought, so that I feared to move him lest some gaping wound should show itself to the woman. But when I bent down and felt the young man's wrist, warm and pulsing with an even beat of the heart, I knew that I was mistaken. He lived; what was more, and this was the surpassing mystery, he breathed like a hale man.

"Monsieur," said the woman, ignoring my astonishment, "will you carry him to my boudoir—oh, I thank God that it is no worse; he is only sleeping."

It was not a moment for argument, but as I lifted the unknown in my arms, two unanswerable questions flashed upon my mind—the first, how came it that this man lay asleep in such a place; the second, what instinct guided the woman so that she knew he was sleeping. Just as I had feared the secret of the house when it was not discovered, so did this discovery of it *seem to me the greatest wonder I had heard or read of.* I began to have a dread of the house which nothing could shake off. Who were these people, I asked myself? Whence came their riches, what was the meaning of the work of that night? And where was that "other" of whom she had made mention? God knows, the mystery perplexed me—the unbroken silence was as a harbinger of death; I could feel the sweat rolling down my face when I carried the sleeping man to the boudoir she had named and there laid him upon a sofa. But the mistress of the house was herself again. Fear had fallen from her like a cloak. Her new manner was imperious, almost commanding.

"Monsieur," she said, "I thank you from my heart. My brother only sleeps, as you see. He is subject to these attacks. They leave him weak and ill, but we can do nothing for him while they last. I shall watch with him until he wakes."

She stood at the door hesitating as though she had the wish that I should leave her. But my astonishment at her desire and at the spectacle of the man, lying in a trance upon her sofa, kept me rooted to the spot. I was about to mutter some question, some desire for a further word upon it, when I heard a door shut very softly in the hall below; and so unexpected was the sound that I drew back as though a hand had touched me.

"Madam," I whispered, "there are others in the house."

"Oh, go, go!" she cried with an agitation she could not control; "go, I beseech you and leave me alone."

I bowed to her and left the room. When I turned the corner of the first landing I could see her majestic figure outstanding in the morning light. I thought that I looked upon it for the last time. I did not know—but that is my story.

There was sunshine in the hall; but I passed through it swiftly, fearing with a child's fear that some unseen hand would be outstretched to touch me as I walked. Not until the street door had closed behind me and the sweet air of a June morning breathed upon my face, did dread of that house of mystery leave me. But in the street, I stood to gaze at its lightless windows, and to ask myself if, indeed, I had witnessed the things of that night or had dreamed them upon my way. Outwardly it was as other houses, black and bare with drawn blinds and gloomy portals; but within—what story could it tell. God alone knew, I said, and so turned toward my home.

At the corner of the damnable street, I drank a cup of coffee from a stall. The man who served me remarked that my hand trembled. I did not answer him; but the wind of morning told me that sweat was still running down my face.

CHAPTER II.—IN A GARRET.

I HEARD Benjamin sighing upon the stairs and knew that he carried good tidings. For never was that best of men known to sigh when the news was ill. Moreover, he entered the room boldly, forgetting to remove his hat until he had advanced some paces towards me.

"Well," I said, "you have been?"

He sidled towards me like a crab: for thus was his habit acquired in many years of faithful service at my table. There was no door in London, open but the half of a foot though it might have been, through which Benjamin could not slip when the need was.

"Yes, sir," he said, coming quite close to my chair, "I have been."

"And have learned something new."

He fingered the brim of his hat nervously. I think that he was always frightened of me. Yet, let me bear witness, no man ever had a better friend.

"If you please," he said, answering my question with hesitation, "the housemaid at No. 92——"

"Benjamin," I exclaimed severely, "let me hope that I have brought you up in the way you should go. At your age, one does not speak of the housemaid at No. 92——"

He giggled just for all the world like an old woman.

"Oh, sir—oh, indeed—well, to be sure—that you should think it."

"Benjamin," I said, "go on with your story and then I will tell you what I think."

He became serious directly, screwing his neck out of his collar, and sighing with that sigh which had become a part of my monotonous life.

"They told me at 92 that her name's Gavarnie and she's a foreigner," he said quickly. "Very quiet and respectable party and keeps company, sir. A widder lady may be—may be not. Back yard's full of champagne cases and there isn't no washing hung out. She's not much there, but she lives alone and plays the piano. When any one stays in the house, it's a Spanish gentleman—a count they think he is, but they don't know for certain. All the bills are paid every week, sir. Two pound fourteen for fruit last week, which is considerable, you'll admit. Three servants is kept, and two are women. There is nothing else, sir."

"Benjamin," I said, "you ought to be at Scotland Yard."

He laughed again, still nervously.

"The kitchen's my newspaper," he said, "and I don't want no better. You are dining out, sir?"

"Of course—but I shall breakfast here tomorrow?"

The old man looked at me in his quick, nervous way. I believe he would have given a sovereign to have known why I sent him to that gloomy street of Bayswater.

"That's all, Benjamin," I exclaimed.

He shuffled from the room, sighing. The burden of my poverty was heavy, but he shared it uncomplainingly. "Where you go, I go," he had said when misfortune overtook us, "to the world's end if it is to be, sir."

He meant his words, though, God knows, I might as well, at that time, have talked of carrying him to the moon as to the world's end. When a solemn person in Portugal Street pronounces your "public examination" finished and gives you certain good warning against rash and hazardous expenditure, it is not in my experience that he adds to that advice a sum sufficient to insure the payment of your coming butcher's bill. When I was declared a bankrupt, and all that I had went to the Jews, and they took the very rings from my fingers, and sent me out to this exile of a two pair back in the Marylebone Road, Benjamin alone was left to me. I could not raise money on him and so he stayed. Possibly, if it had been otherwise he would have gone. They used to say in the tenth that I would play for my own right hand. I believe they were right.

Benjamin left the room on this afternoon of which I am writing, and I walked to my window, thinking again of that strange night, now a week gone, when the monotony of my life had been broken for an instant by the apparition of the woman and the strange things I had seen in her house. Not for an hour, I believe, did the mystery of that day cease to shape stories for me or to set me racking my brains for anything that would throw light upon the house or upon its people. "A foreigner," said the gossips of the street, "a rich woman living alone." She paid her bills—oh, wonderful testimony to the perfect neighbor! She went out much. There were empty champagne bottles in her garden! I laughed to myself, remembering the news old Benjamin had gathered. The sweet face of the woman had looked at me often since that night? I had stood with her again in the house of my sleep. What freak of destiny, I asked, permitted me to pass by when those

who were her guests had driven her to the street? Would the same destiny lead me to her house again? Was the instinct, which kept dinning it into my ears that this woman had become my friend, a true premonition or the mere fancy of the dreamer? These thoughts and questions were my companions day and night. The tidings which old Benjamin carried neither added to the number of them nor gave me answer. I was like a child which had looked upon some stage picture for an instant and then had been hurried from the theater. The mystery pursued me relentlessly—even to my bed.

There is not a great deal of that which the French papers call "le high-life" to be seen from the upper windows of a house in the Marylebone Road—unless the "highlife" in question be a matter of altitude. For a little while, I stood watching the endless procession of railway vans and lumbering wagons. Then, weary of the prospect, and remembering that for Benjamin's sake I must sooner or later go out and pretend to dine, I put on my hat and descended the well worn stairs.

But I had not taken twenty steps westward before I saw the woman herself, the lady of the house of mysteries, driving slowly toward me; and I knew, as though she herself had said it, that her business was with me.

CHAPTER III.—ISABELLA DE GAVARNIE.

THE carriage was a victoria, superbly horsed; my lady herself was dressed as only a Parisian at Longchamps or a Viennese in the Prater knows how to dress. I thanked God in that moment for the good frock coat and the fresh silk hat which Portugal Street had left to me. The garret which I had just quitted was remembered for an instant as the shabbiest in all London.

It was all the work of a moment, my own surprise and unconcealed pleasure, her cry of recognition, the swift reining in of the horses, the swerve of the carriage against the curbstone. Ten seconds did not pass, I believe, before I was holding her hand and telling myself how different she was from the woman who had crouched and shuddered in the house of mysteries. For the sunshine of the lingering day fell upon a face of surpassing sweetness; and the eyes, in which I had seen tears, were now aglow with the radiance of a woman's laughter.

"Captain Falconer," she said, speaking in quaint and pretty English, with the faintest possible accent to give it charm, "how lucky I am! I was coming to see you."

I thought of my garret, and flushed as a schoolgirl at her first compliment.

"Madam——" I exclaimed, and then stuck for the word.

"Gavarnie," she said, as though answering a question I had not spoken. "Will you let me come into your house and speak to you for a little while?"

Her hand had rested in mine while she put the question, but now she drew it back and began to unwrap the white rug from her knees. I don't know what I said to her, but in my heart I cursed the Marylebone Road and its people—but more particularly the two pair back to which destiny had condemned me. When next I had command of my tongue, she was sitting in

my one armchair and declaring that of all perfumes she adored most the smell of tobacco. As for old Benjamin, I heard him in my bed room laughing like a child. And when Benjamin laughed the world looked black, indeed.

"Madame Gavarnie," I exclaimed at last, accepting the worst, yet encouraged not a little by her manner, which was that of one who had a woman's heart and sympathy, "Madame Gavarnie, I will not apologize for my rooms, but I wish that they were better for your sake. At least, let me offer you some tea——"

She put her hand upon my arm with a movement so gentle that all my shame passed in a moment.

"Are we not friends?" she said. "Am I not in a friend's house? Why speak of these things? I know your story, Captain Falconer—at least some of it. I have come here to know the rest. Oh, yes, I will take a cup of tea, and you shall talk to me while I drink it."

I called loudly for Benjamin to bring us tea, "and, for God's sake, in an uncracked cup," I added *sotto voce*. When she was sipping it, her veil turned up about her French hat, and the bright glow upon her handsome face, I wondered that I could have lived in London so long and never heard her name.

"You have been expecting me to call upon you," she exclaimed presently, regarding me curiously with her great black eyes.

"I never thought of it in that way, but I have thought of you a thousand times since first I saw you in the street."

"I was foolish," she exclaimed quickly; "there was no need to be so silly. My brother is well again, now, and has forgotten the quarrel with his friend. We, Spaniards, you know, are quick in temper. But we do not remember as you English. You will keep my secret, Captain Falconer?"

I said to her that I would; to myself I said that she could tell a lie with any woman in Europe. Then she continued:

"Are you not the second son of Sir Francis Falconer, who was some time at the embassy in Madrid? I seemed to know the name directly you uttered it. And the face—you have your father's face. I was very young then, but I have never forgotten one who showed so many kindnesses to me."

She looked round the room as though she could not reconcile my apartment with her memories of the man.

"I am glad that you remember my father," I said; "you know, possibly, that he died four years ago at Belgrade. The fortune which he left me has gone to the Jews. My other distinctions are notorious. I resigned my commission in the Tenth Hussars last Christmas, and was declared a bankrupt three months ago. Believe me, Madame Gavarnie, I should make the fortune of a curate who wanted an example of the vices."

She smiled at the thought, but was serious again when she answered me.

"And your own fortune—do you not think of that?"

I rose from my chair and paced the room wearily.

"Fools are those who do not succeed," I said gloomily. "Thirty seven millions there were in Carlyle's time; there are more today and I am one of

them. Tell me, what in God's name have I to do with fortune, madam? Have I brains? Assuredly not, or the Jews would have left me my money. Have I influence? Yes, the influence of those who are scheming to get me out of the country because of the disgrace. Have I friends——"

She cut me short with a word.

"Yes," she said, "since you are the friend of Isabella de Gavarnie. I am right to say that, Captain Falconer?"

We were face to face now, for she had risen from her seat, and stood with her hand laid very prettily upon my arm again. I read in her eyes something more than sympathy; the touch of her soft fingers made my heart leap.

"Oh, madam," I exclaimed, "what is the friendship of a ruined man worth to you?"

"If it should be worth all?" she answered quickly, betraying an excitement as astonishing as it was unlooked for. "If it should mean happiness, love, the things which make a woman's life; if it should mean that to me—your friendship, would you give it then, Captain Falconer?"

I bent down and kissed her hand. "A superb actress," I said to myself, "or one who lives in the shadow of a mystery." But to her I said:

"A thousand times—I should ask no greater happiness."

It was plain to me that she was greatly agitated; a fact which seemed to link the events of that strange night, when I had searched her house and come upon the body of a sleeping man there, with her visit to my garret in the Marylebone Road. I was quite sure that she had told me nothing of the true history of that business; and when she sat again in my armchair and made a sign to me to take a seat at her side, I thought that she was about to speak of it. But for a while she said nothing, though I could see her searching for words and covering her difficulty with an exquisite play of her magnificent fan.

"Captain Falconer," she said of a sudden, laying her fan upon her knee, "did not they say that you were the finest swordsman in your regiment?"

"They said a good many absurd things, Madame Gavarnie."

She ignored the evasion.

"And the best horseman?" she continued.

"Oh, my dear lady, will you not spare me?"

"You like the civilian's life?"

"Like it? Heaven forbid!"

"You would not refuse the offer of a commission abroad if it were made to you?"

"A commission abroad—in a European regiment?"

She laughed at my uncoucealed astonishment.

"In a regiment of which all Europe will hear before the year is out?"

"For a possible service against my own country, madam?"

"For a possible service against the world, captain."

Isabella de Gavarnie had the Southern love for the dramatic in thought, in word, in act. No queen of tragedy could have spoken the words as she spoke them. Even my stupefying surprise at her words could not hide from

my eyes the superb beauty of the woman or the sweetness of her girlish face. Yet what she meant, or of what service she wished to speak, I knew no more than old Benjamin in my kitchen.

"Madame Gavarnie," I said, "you jest with me."

"With such a jest, captain, that will give you at a word all you love best in life, will put a sword in your hands again—will make you the master of men and of fortune, will send you back here to claim the name and the lands you have lost—that is how I jest, my friend."

Her manner was superb—the manner of a grand dame rewarding one who had served her and won favor. To say that I understood her or could make anything of her promise would be to claim a foresight very foreign to me.

"My dear lady," I said at length, "we live in the nineteenth century when romance has ceased to be. If you had come to me a hundred years ago—and pardon me, a hundred years could not age Madame Gavarnie—I should have been all ears for your proposal. But today, now, when the mercenary is a brigand of the Balkans, and swordsmanship is a show far a *salle d'armes*—do you think it wonderful that I cannot answer you? You speak of a service against the world; of a service in which I am to win fortune; of a regiment of which all Europe will hear before the year is out. I answer you with a question—what are the conditions of such a service?"

"The conditions are two, captain—the first that you leave England tomorrow morning for Zaragoza; the second that you go to Spain as the friend of Isabella de Gavarnie. Do not think that I come here unselfishly, a philanthropist who would confer some obligation upon you. I come rather to claim a service of you. If you listen to my promises, if, as I know you will, you go to Spain tomorrow, I ask that it shall be as the guardian of my secrets and of my interests. I am about to bring you face to face with a man born to be a king of men; of a man, God knows, to whom my life, my fortune, will be intrusted presently for my eternal happiness or my eternal misery. I send you to one who is a living mystery, incomprehensible as the story of life itself; to a man able to scorn time and space and country—who is today in London, tomorrow in St. Petersburg; a man from whom no secrets are hidden; powerful to win the love of men; relentless in enmity, unswerving in friendship—to him I send you to be his servant, but more than that to be my friend. Captain Falconer, you will leave England tomorrow—is it not written down in the book of your destiny which sent you to my house a week ago; you will leave England and before you return, he to whom you go to serve will have won his kingdom—and his wife."

She clutched her fan convulsively; I could see that her heart was pulsing quickly; in her eyes I beheld a light of awe, of mystery, as of some thought half pleasing, half to be dreaded. Nor could I mistake her words. She would send me to Spain to tell her of the man who was to become her husband. Never, surely, was there a more remarkable embassy.

It has seemed to me since then that the whole course of my life was changed in that moment. Curiosity, awe, wonder possessed me in turn. A thousand questions were suggested and left unasked. "She sends me to her

lover," I said to myself again and again. No longer had I any doubt what answer I should give her. I must see him who had won the love of Isabella de Gavarnie.

"You speak of strange things, Madame Gavarnie," I said after we had sat for some minutes in silence—"of a service which I cannot so much as imagine; of a man whom I am anxious already to know. Yet, if it be to your interest, I will go to the end of the earth. There is nothing, surely, to keep me in England. If this employment you name be an honorable employment, such as a soldier may follow, your friend shall find a willing comrade. Tell me only, where shall I look for him; what shall I say to him; how shall I make myself known——"

She rose and clapped her hands; no childish delight could have been expressed more prettily.

"I knew you would go; I knew you would be my friend," she exclaimed, looking up to me with eyes which betrayed a woman's gratitude, "and you shall never regret, never to your life's end, that you have been willing to obey me. Tomorrow, you leave England, captain. In three days you will be in the mountains where my childhood was spent. I beg you forget the name of Isabella de Gavarnie before you cross the Spanish frontier. Keep the secret between us as you value your safety. Think of nothing but the new career which fortune has opened to you. For myself, when I have need of you, my messenger will come. And you will not fail me—I know it—I know it, oh, I have known it since first you spoke to me in the silence of my house."

She waited for my answer with an excitement she could not conceal. For myself, it had all come so swiftly upon me, she had spoken of such strange things, that curiosity alone would have sent me upon her errand. And it seemed ridiculous, indeed, that I must step in between the drama of the moment and the drama to come with a word upon a small matter which even my lady's grand manner would not permit me to forget.

"Well," she cried, observing my hesitation, and taking alarm at it, "you do not answer me."

"Madam," I replied with a laugh to cover the shame I felt, "point out to me the railway company that will carry a bankrupt to Spain for the honor of his company, and my answer is made."

It was good, upon my word, to read the pity in her eyes when my meaning was made plain to her. Swiftly, lest I should refuse her, with hands that trembled upon the silken slings, she snatched at her satchel and took from it a letter sealed with a black seal and addressed already to me.

"Oh," she exclaimed impatiently, "that I should forget it! Of course your friends have thought of that. This letter will tell you of things you need to know. Believe me, Captain Falconer, the debt is mine a thousand times. And you will keep the secret of Isabella de Gavarnie? She may call you her friend?"

She laid the letter upon the table, and turning, held out both her hands to me. For a moment I had them in mine, and looked into the eyes of her who had come so mysteriously into my life. No word was spoken, no other

greeting passed. But that instant of time chained me to her in a bond which nothing but her death or mine may sever.

* * * * *

Next morning at ten o'clock old Benjamin and I left Victoria for Madrid. We were at the Casa de Arifio, the best hotel in the Spanish town of Zaragoza, at sunrise on the second day after.

CHAPTER IV.—THE WHITE HUSSARS OF THE MOUNTAINS.

I OFTEN used to say that if I had told my man Benjamin to be ready to cut off his master's head (by request) on the following morning at eight o'clock, he would have answered, "Very good, sir." Twice in his life, perhaps, has he expressed by a look, and a sigh heavy beyond the ordinary, his surprise at that which I had done or was about to do.

"Benjamin, we go to Spain tomorrow."

"Very good, sir."

"You will take first class tickets and berths in the wagons lits."

"Very good, sir."

"To any one who asks you will say that we shall be back in a month's time—but for your own information, Benjamin, I would have you to know that we may never come back at all."

"Very—good—sir."

But oh! what a sigh upon that.

From Paris to Madrid, I do not think that this man of men addressed a word to me. I heard him, by here and there, cursing in good Middlesex, the various thieves who sought to honor the *caballero Ingles*. But when we arrived at the picturesque, if dirty town of Zaragoza, surprise at it all became too much for him and we had not been five minutes in the hotel before he blurted out a question.

"Any orders for tomorrow, sir?"

"Sleep, Benjamin—that is the order. Do you not see it is four o'clock of the morning?"

"I see many things I don't understand, sir, beside the clocks."

I looked at him. His cunning old eyes were watching me curiously.

"Your master is in the same position, Benjamin," said I at last. "He does not know why he is in this hotel at all; he does not understand how money came into his pockets; he does not know, any more than the dead, where his next bed will be laid. You are astonished—well, so is he. Get him a whisky and soda, Benjamin, or any substitute for it which this stinking city can provide. You like Spain—you like the *sevontas*, they are better than the housemaid at 92, Benjamin?"

He chuckled nervously; and then became very serious.

"You will pardon me, sir—that I should name it—well, to be sure, you do not think there is any risk, sir?"

"Benjamin," said I decisively, "as for the risk, I am like the converted Jew, I don't care a curse either way. Where we are going to, or what is to become of us, God only knows. But if our throats must be cut next Satur-

day, I would not, for that, go back to the devils of Portugal Street or the haunts they found for me in the Marylebone Road."

The old man straightened himself up, and looked me full in the face.

"We shall never go back there, sir—God grant it."

He shuffled off to bed and I to my room. It was the hour of dawn, and the Spanish town shimmered in the first glow of the terrible sunshine. I saw her spires standing up like needles against the sluggish and muddy Ebro. Her narrow streets were alive, and blocked already with the primitive carts of the countrymen awaiting market. Church bells called the peasants to mass. A haze of white and spreading mists steamed up from the fertile plains beyond the city's bounds, promising a day of surpassing heat to come. Even in my airy room at the Casa de Ariño, the morning air was heavy as a breath from a city's lung. I could not sleep, was too tired to walk, too excited to think of aught but the strange fortune which had carried me—a bankrupt soldier—from England to a service the nature of which I could not even guess at, to a city which hitherto had been no more than a name to me.

Often since I set out from England had I stood a moment to ask myself upon what enterprise I was embarking, or what good I was seeking? I would say at such times that Isabella de Gavarnie was a creature of my own imagination; that her desire for me to go to Spain and wait there until her messenger should find me out, was a desire of my fancy. But in Zaragoza, at the window of the hotel which looked out upon the dirty city of northern Spain, I could hide the reality from me no longer. No miracle, I said, nowadays would carry a bankrupt in a sleeping car from Paris to Zaragoza; no miracle would put five hundred pounds in the pockets of him who yesterday had not five hundred pence. Yet answers to the other questions which came rushing upon my mind were not to be found. The great mystery remained—the mystery of the noble woman who had sent me upon the errand, the mystery of the man I had set out to find.

Who was she, this stately creature, upon whose house I had stumbled so strangely in that devilish street of Bayswater? What service of the sword could there be in Spain for a ruined officer of English hussars? These things she had neglected to speak of. I had her letter, it is true; the letter sealed with the black seal, and laid upon my table so delicately in that garret in London. But it gave me no clue to her purpose, as you shall learn presently. Many times I read the few lines she had written upon a plain piece of note paper. They seemed to be lines in keeping with the dramatic character of the woman I had encountered so dramatically.

At the Casa de Ariño, in the town of Zaragoza, he to whom you are sent will seek for you. Let no mention of my name cross your lips. Forget that you have heard it, as you value your life. Yet in your heart may there be friendship for

ISABELLA DE GAVARNIE.

So ran the letter which she had left upon my table. It was twice folded and wrapped in English bank notes to the value of five hundred pounds. Beyond these, a slip cut from a French newspaper made up the contents of her envelope. I read the cutting in London, but could make nothing of it.

I read it again in Madrid and said that it magnified the mystery. I read it for the third time at the window of the Casa de Arifio and suddenly—out of the void of mystery—a little light of understanding seemed to shine upon me.

It was a cutting from the Paris *Figaro*. Some one had put a date upon the margin of it—the third day of June in the week that I had met Madame Gavarnie. It was scarce fifteen lines in all; a mere *jeu d'esprit* written at hazard by a jester of the day. Seated at my desk in Florence now that many months have passed, the momentous events I have lived through are recalled to my eyes by that slip of paper as by nothing else the years have given to me. I live again the life of the mountain and the city; death once more is my bedfellow; once more I hear the voice of him at whose name the Spaniard has learned to tremble; once more night shadows the victory; and, the White Hussars of Gavarnie—

But that is to tell my story; and I know not how so strange a story will be understood unless it be heard from the beginning when first I read the slip as you shall read it now; the persiflage of a jester in the Paris *Figaro*:

CHEZ TARTARIN.

Our friends, the tourists, who are going to Spain this autumn, will hear if not with interest, at least with amusement, that the Army of the Mountains is again troubling the heads of the good people of Arragon. Ever since Philip, Count of Gavarnie, was banished from the Pyrénées in the year 1876, these simple men of the mountains have clung to the belief that the White Hussars their master used to command still ride the hills of Arragon. and make their voices heard in the forests about his home. *Vive la verité!* Our latest news of the regiment is from *Le Soir*, the evening paper of Toulouse, which is so kind as to entertain us with a story of a traveler who crossed the Pyrénées recently from Torla to Gèdre and not only heard the superstition of the White Hussars, but beheld them riding on the hill, a magnificently mounted troop as magnificently horsed and drilled. We take our hat off to this traveler—and to our friends, the hussars of Gavarnie.

Many times I read that paragraph before I put it in my pocketbook again. Though I had traveled all night in a cursed Spanish cattle truck, sleep was not to be won; nor even a pretense of rest to be enjoyed. Do what I would, the words of the *Figaro's* jester kept ringing in my ears. I had not been ten years in a cavalry regiment at home and remained ignorant of the hussars who served under Philip of Gavarnie, and bore the burden of the Carlist war as no other regiment in all Spain. And she who had sent me upon this errand—was not her name Gavarnie also? I stamped my foot at the folly which had not connected these things before.

Philip of Gavarnie, the noblest of all the crowd of true men and false who contested the throne of Spain with Alfonso the Twelfth—was he, then, the father of the woman who thus had crossed my path? But his death was already written in history: and who would win the confidence of the men of Arragon as he had won it? Moreover, my lady had spoken of a service not against a dynasty, but against the world.

Rack my brains as I might, the threads of the story were not to be gathered up. I thought of all possible causes which might lead a man to enlist a troop of horsemen in those rugged wilds of the Pyrénées, yet none could explain Madame de Gavarnie's promises, her fears, her warnings. For how should service in a regiment of hussars make the fortune of him who served;

and how should a regiment hide itself from the world, if its purpose were against the world, there in the highlands of modern Spain? Curiosity, indeed, had me as in a vise. Not until the bells of the cathedral clocks were striking midday did I turn from my weary pursuit of these shadows and fall into an unrefreshing sleep. "The man will send for me," I said before I slept, "today; tomorrow, I shall know all—and then?"

I passed to sleep with the question upon my lips; I awoke to ask it again unto twenty times. Zaragoza was quickening to the life of night then. You heard music from her gardens; saw pretty women upon her balconies, beheld the cloaked cavaliers of romance in her streets. With a word to old Benjamin to have dinner ready against my return, I quitted the Casa de Añño and turned mysteps towards the great stone bridge which for centuries has spanned the river Ebro. There, I was standing in the moonbeams, watching the shimmer of the silver light upon the lapping waters, when some one touched my arm; and turning swiftly I beheld a gipsy girl who beckoned me to follow her.

CHAPTER V.—GIRALDA THE GIPSY.

THE girl stood in the shadow of the parapet; a timid, graceful figure half hidden by a black mantilla which fell from her well poised head almost to her feet. I had heard often of the Gitanos of Zaragoza, and thought at the first that she was of their number—a gipsy from the gardens beyond the wall come to beg *cuartos* of the Englishman. But that idea passed swiftly. Even as I hesitated whether to obey impulse again—as I had obeyed it so often since I met Isabella de Gavarnie—or to dismiss the gipsy with a curt word, she advanced from the shadows and all doubt was at an end. For she carried a passport which no man—and a soldier less than other men—knows how to refuse; a face so beautiful and winning that I swore it was not surpassed in all the paintings of the masters. Moreover, it was plain that she was a mere child.

I call her a child, and, in truth, it was plain to me from the first that she was very young. Never shall I forget the picture she made as she stood there in the moonlight with the clear beams falling softly upon her pretty head, and a glitter of trinkets about her arms and throat. No longer was it possible to think of her as the dancing girl from the taverns beyond the city's walls. She lacked all the boldness and impudence which would have betrayed such a calling. I could read in her attitude fear both for herself and me—for her own sake in so far as our meeting might compromise her; for mine in that I might refuse her a hearing. But my astonishment at her beauty and at the comparative richness of her dress kept me silent and doubting. Was it possible that this little gipsy girl came to me from Isabella, the magnificent? A voice answered yes—the same voice said, listen, and follow her.

"Señor," she whispered at last, speaking in French richly colored with the accent of those who live upon the frontier towns, "you seek some one in Zaragoza?"

I raised my hat, advancing in my turn from the shadows.

"Since I have found you, señorita, the search is at an end."

She drew back as though resenting the compliment. It was not to be hidden from me that she feared watchers in the dark places beyond the bridge.

"At the gate of the cathedral, Señor," she exclaimed shyly; and with that was gone like a frightened thing, away toward the great church upon the left bank of the river.

I cast a quick look round to make sure that no one followed me and then sought the church she had named. There are two cathedrals in Zaragoza, but that of which she spoke is called the Seu; and thereby stands the famous gate, La Pavosteria. No better place in all the city could have been chosen at such an hour of night by one who sought to escape the prying eyes of gossips or of spies. Already the taverns and the fondas were merry with the junketings of the human night birds. Guitars twanged from many a balcony; there was music in many a garden; but the great church and its close were as silent as the tombs they shadowed.

The gipsy girl was waiting for me when I came up to the gate. I could see her picturesque figure motionless as one of the pillars by which she stood. When I spoke to her, she drew aside her mantilla and showed me eyes no longer timid or afraid. I saw then much to my surprise that her hair was light in color almost as the hair of an English blonde; while the exquisite delicacy of her skin, and the smallness of her hands and feet, betrayed an origin which had no kinship with the rôle she assumed so easily.

"Señor," she said, almost with a childish delight in her triumph, "I knew that you would come here."

"Señorita, there was no choice since you commanded."

"*Madre de Dios*—who is Giralda, the gipsy, to command?"

"She is queen of all gipsies——"

The flattery pleased her. She turned laughing eyes toward me and thrust out a little foot from her artificially ragged petticoat. A ray of the moonlight falling upon the silver buckle of her shoe made it shine as a knot of diamonds. I said that she was sixteen; and I doubted no longer that she had assumed a disguise.

"Señorita," I continued, observing her hesitation, "you have a message for me?"

She shrugged her shoulders; as who should say, that depends.

"*Ay dios*—I have many messages, but for you—señor; is it not for you to speak?"

"Not at all, it is for your friends in London to have written to you——"

I saw that we could not come at the thing by any argle barge; and so blurted out my tale without more ado.

"Now see," continued I, "here is an Englishman sent to Zaragoza from London by a friend of his who tells him that a message will be delivered in this city. Very well—that Englishman has not been a day in the place before you touch him upon the shoulder and ask him if he does not seek some one. Should not that make us good friends, señorita?"

"You would wish to be the friend of Giralda?" she asked, still playing the coquette.

"A thousand times—when I learn that the wish is hers also."

I have always said that there never were two eyes which could invite to flirtation as the eyes of Giralda, the gipsy girl.

"I am your friend for the sake of her who sent you," she answered simply. "I shall be your friend always—Captain Falconer."

"You know me, then!"

"*Madre de Dios*—if I know you! Are you not the soldier who has come to serve the priuce? Are you not the friend of my friend? *Bueno*, we ride together presently, and then you shall say if I know you."

I seized her by the wrists—acting upon an impulse not to be avoided—and drew her close to me.

"Little friend," I said, "this has been a week of things I do not understand, but Giralda at least is no mystery until now. Tell me what you mean when you say that we ride together?"

"Señor," she said, becoming serious and lifting her childish face so close to mine that I could feel her warm breath upon my cheek, "I cannot speak of these things, here and now, where twenty may watch us. But this is the message I am to deliver—that you meet me at the prison gate when midnight is striking, and that thence we ride to the prince. You will not fail me, señor?"

I answered her by a kiss upon her pretty lips. For a moment she lay snug in my strong arms; then slipped from them very cleverly and was lost in the black shadows between the pillars of the great church.

But she left me with her command still ringing in my ears; and it seemed to me when she was gone, that the mystery of my journey was the greater for her message.

Max Pemberton.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

SEPTEMBER.

SEPTEMBER comes across the hills;
Hark to her welcome, strong and free
The diapason of the sea,
The treble music of the rills.

A flush dyes every vine and tree,
The sunlit land with rapture thrills;
This is the autumn's jubilee!
September comes across the hills.

Fragrance with lavish hand she spills;
Magician of the year is she,
To whom all nature bends the knee.
Announced by woodland scents and trills,
September comes across the hills!

THE VOYAGE OF THE PULO WAY.*

A record of some strange doings at sea—The bold project of a tramp steamer's captain and the sequel to its execution—A justifiable mutiny and its thrilling episodes.

CHAPTER I.—CAPTAIN MACSHIEL, DISLIKES PASSENGERS.

THE singular eccentricity of fate in weaving the web of human fortunes was never better exemplified than in my own life. There was I, a drudge in the office of Messrs. Latheson & Co., the well known merchants of Hong Kong, receiving for my drudgery the not enormous stipend of twenty dollars a week. There was no future for me, or, at least, no future to which I looked forward with any degree of pleasure. Ledgers, invoices, and the eternal scratching of pens! Sick or well, there was no escaping the dingy desk or the high stool. Today was just the same as yesterday; tomorrow would be the same as today; and so on through the years, till disease or accident brought the fooling to an end and Happy Valley received me feet foremost.

Such, I say, was about all the prospect I had in life, when fate, being in one of her whimsical moods, gave the wheel of fortune an erratic twist which shot me into the midst of a series of astounding adventures and completely changed the whole course of my life. How it happened, what those adventures were, and sundry other incidents connected with them, I will set down in the order in which they occurred, hoping that the singularity of my experiences may atone somewhat for my other deficiencies.

I had been in Messrs. Latheson's Hong Kong house for something over three years, and I have every reason to believe that during that time I gave my employers entire satisfaction. Indeed, our chief took rather a liking to me, and often honored me with his confidence; and once, when the firm had effected an enormous deal in rice, I was sent to Saigon to superintend matters. It meant nothing, of course, beyond a certain inward glow of satisfaction, for which my own ambitions were primarily responsible. Yet it took the keen edge off the surprise which was so soon to follow.

I remember rolling up to the office that morning feeling as though I would barter ten years of my life for six months' freedom. My head ached, my eyeballs throbbed; a nervous tremor, for which I could not account, most disagreeably affected my members. I clambered on to my stool, chewed my pen reflectively, and stared vacantly at the book before me; and even as I sat a-dreaming one of my brother drudges came up behind and caught me a thump on the back that sent me sprawling across the desk.

"Here, wake up!" he cried. "The chief wants to see you."

My nerves were in such a state that I could have shrieked aloud, but

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turning upon him with a sorrowful look, I made my way to the chief's private sanctum. What followed between us need not be set down in detail, though as it happened the interview was to prove of much consequence to me.

It seemed that the manager of our branch house in Manila had been taken seriously ill; the doctors had ordered him rest and a complete change of air, and I was offered his post till such time as heaven should restore him to health or take him from a wicked world. Should the last presumably regretful contingency occur, I was given to understand, providing sundry "ifs" were not insurmountable, that I might find the post a permanent one.

Needless to say I jumped at the offer, which, coming at such an opportune moment, seemed like a gift of the gods.

"And when shall I go, sir?"

"By the very first ship," said he. "It is imperative that you should lose as little time as possible."

My next duty was to discover which was the first ship to leave for Manila, and in less than an hour I learned that the Pulo Way, a small steamer of about eight or nine hundred tons, was to sail on the morrow. I didn't much fancy small coasters of such tonnage, but under the present circumstances I had neither the right nor the wish to be fastidious.

Upon calling at the agent's office I ascertained that the Pulo Way was not in the habit of carrying passengers, or at least not passengers aft. Coolies she carried forward in the steerage, as do all the coasters; first class passengers generally wait to choose their ship. But as I could not wait, the agent very kindly gave me a letter to the captain, saying he doubted not that worthy mariner would be able to fix me up.

Well, armed with this introduction, I made my way down to the jetty, hired a sampan, and very soon the Pulo Way hove in sight. Honestly, I cannot say that the first glimpse of her impressed me. She was an ideal ocean scavenger, even to her dirty funnel and her two black sticks of masts. Nor did a closer inspection prove more alluring. Here and there, at irregular intervals along her side, the paint had been rubbed off, and great blotches of rust made the wretched little tub look dingier and dirtier than she really was.

As I stepped on the deck I found that portion of the ship just what I expected to find it, though I should not forget to make due allowance for a vessel that is loading. Away forward a winch was going as if for dear life, and if there is a brain breaking brute of a thing it is a steam winch.

Aft rose a deckhouse about twenty five feet long and some ten or twelve feet broad, on each side of which was a door that swung outwards. Peeping through the door nearest me, I saw that the house contained the companion-way which led into the saloon, and as there was no one about to guide me, I immediately began to descend the stairs. But I had not proceeded more than half a dozen steps when the sound of a man speaking arrested me.

"I'll tell you what it is," a rough voice was saying impressively, "it's as safe as eggs; and who'll be a penny the wiser?"

The reply was whispered cautiously—so cautiously that I could not catch it. Then, fearing I might be hearing that which concerned me not, I coughed loudly and descended forthwith.

The saloon was only a small one, about the size of the deckhouse above, and contained a long, narrow table with benches on each side. At the head of this table, his back to me, sat a man; on the bench to the right of him sat another. As I burst in upon them they sprang quickly to their feet, while the smaller man—he who sat at the head of the table—hastily crumpled up a newspaper cutting and slipped it into his pocket. Seeing the evident annoyance my sudden entry had caused, I began to apologize.

"I beg your pardon, but can you tell me if Captain Macshiel is on board?"

"I am Captain Macshiel," replied the smaller man, in a dry, rasping voice, his eyes passing over me a quick, searching glance.

"I have a letter for you, sir."

He held out his hand and took the agent's note, which, after a moment or two of irresolution and a furtive glance at his companion, he began to read. While he did so I stole a look round the saloon, and another at him and his companion. The saloon was plain enough, there being no room for superfluities aboard this boat. A rack with curved grooves for glasses swung above the table, and in those grooves half a dozen colored wine glasses were ranged resplendent. On each side of the table were the cabins of the captain and his chief officers. There were no fittings or external decorations. All was economic and useful.

The two men were more interesting. Captain Macshiel was a narrow chested individual, with a cadaverous, sun dried face, and a sharp, thin nose that bent curiously at the tip. He had a pale blue eye of surprising penetration, and a rather ragged fringe of black hair, which, sprouting out of his neck, hedged his chin in a somewhat singular fashion. His companion was altogether different, being vast of stature, but somewhat clumsy, like a big mau who has grown fat through laziness. There was little modesty in this person's demeanor, for he fairly stared me out of countenance. Nor was I at all complimented by this attention, for the man's face was extremely unprepossessing. Indeed, his heavy brows, thick, flat nose, and coarse mouth made him almost repulsive. I could imagine the thick, square jaw beneath his thick black beard; and I thought that much wisdom was displayed by him in showing as little as possible of his forbidding physiognomy.

The captain carefully folded the letter and laid it on the table before him. Then he looked up and down and round about, like a timid girl who dare not even glance into the ardent eyes of the young man by her side. Next he coughed affectedly, then trifled with the tip of his nose.

"Our agent informs me that you require a passage, Mr.—Mr."—referring to the letter—"Mr. Ravensford?"

"Yes, sir, that's so."

"The Pulo Way is hardly a passenger boat."

"So they tell me; but there will be no other going for a week, and I must reach Manila with all dispatch."

"I see."

At first I thought the man resented my unwarrantable intrusion, but a moment's reflection convinced me to the contrary. Your ordinary tramp skipper is, as a rule, only too proud to carry passengers. They add to his dignity, and fill him with a delightful sense of his own importance.

"I should be very pleased to take you, Mr. Ravensford," he began, in a dry voice—a voice that seemed to rake the words along his throat—"but I really have no proper accommodation aft. You see, we are only a tramp—a common little body that never soars so high as first class passengers."

"Oh," I laughed, though I caught the sneer well enough, "I dare say we shall manage very well. It is absolutely necessary that I should go by the first ship."

Favoring me with another of his quick, curious glances, he fidgeted one hand in his pocket, then the other, shuffled his feet about in an uncertain fashion, and then sank into his chair. As he did so his eyes sought those of the black bearded gentleman on his right, and though it was but a momentary flash, it set me thinking.

"True, I should be very proud to sail in your company," he continued, in his dry, sing song fashion, which was half a sneer, "for you may be sure I have little congenial companionship on a boat like this. But the fact is, we were not built for passengers, and to say that I could make you comfortable would be to inveigle you on board under false pretenses."

"You are much too scrupulous, Captain Macshiel. While I admire your honesty as a man, I do not approve of your discretion as a trader. I assure you it was not by cultivating such an extremely fine sense of justice that Messrs. Latheson built up their princely house."

"Well," he muttered, a smile of much meaning playing round his mouth, "I have no wish to sail under false colors;" and he looked at big blackbeard as if for approval. But that worthy never opened his mouth. He only nodded his big head solemnly and smiled with his eyes.

I knew well enough the man didn't want me, though why I could not imagine, as my presence on board could scarcely have increased his responsibility or affected him in any way. But I had made up my mind to go, and I let him know as much in no uncertain manner; though an exhaustive apology for my seeming perversity naturally accompanied the declaration. Any accommodation would do for me—I had been accustomed to roughing it. He would find me a most exemplary passenger. He hummed and ha'ed and beat sundry inconsequent tattoos upon the table, gave me to understand that his ship was one of the most unpleasant on the coast, that she couldn't steam above ten knots, and that he frequently feared the first serious gale she encountered would send her to the bottom.

Now, all this was so much at variance with the usual boasting of the master mariner, who, as a rule, is intensely loyal to his command, that I was at a loss to comprehend it; and had it not been necessary that I should get away, I would not have forced my objectionable presence upon this piece of nautical fastidiousness. But I was not in a position to accept a rebuff, and so I let him see.

Now and again, while I was speaking, he turned interrogatively towards blackbeard, who did nothing but smile and shake his head; though once, turning suddenly upon that silent creature, I saw his eyes signal a look of assent. When next the captain spoke, his cadaverous little face was wreathed with amiability.

"Well, well," said he, like one who gives way much against his will, "since you're so determined to come with us, we must see what we can do for you. No doubt we shall be able to fix you up somewhere."

"And when do you sail, captain?"

"Not later than ten tomorrow."

"Thanks. Good day."

"Think you can catch us?"

"I'll try."

I shook hands cordially, nodded towards blackbeard, and made my way up on deck, not overpleased with myself or the captain of the Pulo Way. Truly, Captain Macshiel had flattered me but little, which, after all, was nothing; but that he so obstinately refused to earn a few dollars was another and a more important matter. As for blackbeard, he never entered into my calculations at all.

CHAPTER II.—SHIPMATES.

TEN o'clock of the following morning saw me aboard the Pulo Way, amid the accustomed bustle of a ship preparing for sea. An hour later we had cleared the Ly-ee-moon Pass, and were steaming into the full swell of the ocean. Though the captain had professed his inability to provide me with any decent accommodation, I nevertheless found that one of the most commodious of the saloon cabins had been placed at my disposal, and this gave me a better opinion of Captain Macshiel. I fear my shore life had given me rather a liking for creature comforts. At all events, I had none of that desire for roughing it which some fellows seem to fancy.

I was the only saloon passenger, and as I wandered aimlessly about the decks I had many opportunities of quizzing the officers and crew. The latter, as is usual on the coast boats, was Chinese, while Chinese greasers were to be seen skipping about among the pistons in the engine room. Our mate, who was away forward cursing at the men, was a man of good breadth, with a flabby, yellow face and a thin ginger mustache which shot clean out above his mouth like a fringe of bristles. He had two dark, narrow slits of eyes which might have been fathered by a Chinaman. These lent to his big, yellow face such a curious aspect of malevolence and piggish flabbiness that I could not bear to look at him.

The second mate was of an entirely different mold, broad of shoulder and elegant of build, with an extremely fine face, which, though more grimly honest than handsome, had in its dark, rugged outlines the beauty of strength and character. He was only a very young man, not more, I should say, than seven and twenty; yet his face showed signs of the wear and tear of twice that number of years.

I spoke to him after dinner, and found him, like so many sailors, extremely reserved—almost shy; but before we parted I had accepted an invitation to smoke a pipe with him in his room that evening, and, lonely as I was, I waxed curiously impatient till the time came round. He received me with much civility, though with something of the dignity of an archbishop. But when we had warmed a little we talked of Manila, the ship, and our fellow voyagers. I soon learned from him that this was his first voyage in the Pulo Way; and though, like a wise man, he showed a commendable reticence whenever the captain's name was mentioned, he was more communicative once the conversation turned to the chief mate. Indeed, he seemed to regard the latter with a considerable amount of distrust, and hinted in a mysterious sort of way at sundry curious conversations which that worthy had already had with him—hints which then seemed of such little moment that they slipped in at one ear and out at the other, but which, viewed in the light of after events, bear a most significant meaning.

Under the insidious influence of his big black pipe, the second mate gradually began to thaw. His reserve vanished; the dark, brooding face grew soft, till I thought there was never an ugly line upon it. Little by little he gave me a few particulars of himself, and how he came to join the Pulo Way—particulars of little moment, but which seemed interesting enough as he told them. Among other things, I learned that he was a native of the Hawkesbury district of New South Wales, which accounted for his great height and long, loose limbs; for I had heard before of the splendid growth of the Hawkesbury men. I learned, too, that his name was Hayling; that, off and on, he had been to sea since he was fourteen, though there were few things to which he had not put his hand. In turn he had been gold digger, sheep farmer, bushman, telegraphic operator, and, I doubt not, much more than he cared to say. Of gold digging or sheep farming I knew nothing; but I could talk to him of telegraphy, as I had once done a little in that myself.

It was close on ten o'clock when I left him, though I must confess I would have obtruded a little longer on his patience had I not known that he had to be up again in two hours to keep his watch.

The night was very dark and threatening, the wind coming across the water in fitful gusts. Now and again a great wave was flung back from our bows with an ominous crash, and leaning over the bulwarks, I watched with a dreamy sort of interest the white line of froth form, lift itself above the black water, and then subside in infinite darkness. Then all at once I seemed to hear voices a little aft of me, and peering intently into the darkness, I discovered a darker shadow. Well, that was nothing. Other people had as much right on deck as I. This I fully recognized; but as this shadow began imperceptibly to draw near, and as it continued to whisper in a way incomprehensible, I thought it better to make my presence known. This I did by stamping hard upon the deck as I stepped out from the side.

The shadow immediately resolved itself into two figures, which seemed to shrink in closer to the bulwarks; but there being no way of escaping me, I saw that one was the captain and that the other was a Chinaman,

evidently one of our coolie passengers forward—a fellow who towered head and shoulders above Macshiel.

Though thinking it strange, I passed on, apparently oblivious of their proximity, and getting to the leeward of the deckhouse, filled and lit a pipe. Here, a minute or so after, the captain joined me.

"Glass is going down," he began, in his most civil manner. "I think we shall have a blow before morning. Listen;" and he pointed aloft, as though to locate the strange whistling of the wind. "Isn't that a warning as plain as any spoken word?"

"True, to the ear that understands the language."

He laughed rather brusquely.

"A man can't spend twenty years on the coast and not understand the lingo."

"Have you been out here so long?"

"So long that the ill smell of China has got into my blood. You don't know what that is—eh? When did you come out?"

"Three years ago."

"Ah! Then you can still smell a Chinaman in the dark?"

I admitted as much, but with an intonation which might easily have been questioned. He, failing to notice it, continued:

"Yes, twenty years of coast work, sailing these blasted seas till I sometimes wish they'd open and swallow me up. Twenty years of toil, and twenty—forty fortunes made for other men, and devil a stick or stone of my own. That's the story of my life, young man. Well, what do you think of it?"

"Candidly, not much."

He laughed almost boisterously. It was a mad, reckless laugh, which set me wondering.

"No, one could hardly call it successful. A dog's life aboard, and a fool's life ashore. A drunken bout: then carry him on board and make the brute work. And so he works for months, with but one object in view—the drunken bout once again. That's the romance of the sea, my young friend—this foul pond of the devil's making."

Needless to say I was much amazed at this outburst, for not alone were the words strangely fierce and incongruous, but his manner of uttering them had all the snarling savageuess of a snapping beast.

"Fate," said I sententiously, "has dropped us underneath. We may grumble, and scratch, and howl; but if we don't behave ourselves, the man above will probably kick out our brains."

"I intend to have a kick, nevertheless," said he, his voice sounding strangely desperate.

"Well, be careful. The man above is shod with iron."

"Blast him, yes. But I'll tear the iron from his heel and fling it in his face. I'm sick of it, I tell you—sick of working for other people."

"The common lot," said I.

"But mine no longer."

I laughed a little at this unexpected outburst.

"Well, captain, we must make the best of our opportunities."

"I mean to ;" and he bound the declaration with a stupendous oath. Thinking some strange things, I said :

"My dear captain, you were born a hundred years too late."

"Perhaps ;" and though I could not see his face, I knew he smiled grimly. "At any rate, I've been too blamed honest for this world !"

I did not altogether like this. There was an absence of modesty about the confession which robbed it of much of its value. A man complaining of his honesty is like a woman who grieves because she has never succumbed to temptation.

"Well, captain, I suppose honesty is a comparative quality, after all."

"Very," said he. "It all depends on how a thing's done. I've come to the conclusion that the thing that pays best is best."

"But will not honesty pay best in the long run ?"

"My young friend," said he impressively, "there is no such thing as honesty."

"Yet there is something we call by that name."

"A mere word—a played out superstition. Did you ever know an honest man ?"

It was curious, but when the question was put in this way I could not answer. Had I? I did not know.

Noting my embarrassment, he added, with a chuckle :

"No, nor I either, nor anybody else."

I might have retorted, but to little purpose ; so he, accepting my silence as a sign of defeat, shuffled off with a laugh and disappeared below. Leaning against the rail, I smoked on in the darkness. Beneath me the screw swirled angrily, and gradually the wind increased. Occasionally we encountered a stray sea bigger than any of its fellows, and then the old boat gave a most unpleasant lurch—a disagreeable reminder that ours was a most unstable footing.

The captain's words, too, seemed rather ominous ; for when a man who has journeyed half way through middle life comes to the conclusion that honesty is a decrepit superstition, there must be something radically wrong with the world—or with the individual. There was likewise a passionate regret in the man's voice—a tone which under no possible circumstances could be misinterpreted. It was genuine ; the real regret of a man who has lost certain golden opportunities. Naturally, I could not then know the real state of his mind ; and, truth to tell, his conversation did not particularly impress me. Yet I fancied I was not without an inkling of his inner thoughts. That the man rankled with envy was apparent ; that he was grimly desperate was equally obvious. I thought, too, of his strange whispering with the big Chinaman, and wondered if he had a reason for not referring to it.

Yes, it's all clear enough now—a sort of let me see the numbers go up and I'll give you the name of the winner. At the time I laughed somewhat at the splutterings of the disappointed mariner ; after that I forgot all about him as I listened to the sea and thought of my future.

When I awoke the next morning, it was with a jerk which nearly sent me flying out of my berth. The bulkheads groaned, and everything that

was on the floor slid gaily from side to side of the cabin. Out against the port the water foamed angrily, while the incessant pitching and rolling proclaimed the presence of big seas. With the utmost difficulty I dressed and scrambled up, on deck.

It was blowing a great gale. Not a soul was to be seen upon the wet decks, though I knew that behind the weather screen on the bridge the officer would be keeping his watch, possibly the captain also.

Sometimes I think I have an affinity with the wild swirling of waters, bred, perhaps, through a sense of security; for there is something grand in watching the baffled sea furiously fling itself upon the unyielding plates of a sturdy vessel. Indeed, so intent was I gazing at the curious contest, that for a time I did not notice that we were only going about half speed.

The mate came up from below smothered in oilskins, his old sou'wester tied tightly under his chin. As he stepped out on deck and took a look round, he mumbled a surly "Good morning."

"Good morning," I replied. "Nice weather!"

It was sarcastic, but unavoidable. The bad weather had got into me in some way.

"Yes," he growled; "makes one in love with the ocean, don't it?"

I admitted that such elemental eccentricities were conducive to extreme physical enjoyment. Then I asked him how the glass stood.

"Steady," said he.

"That means a continuance of this agreeable weather?"

"That's it. If I was a passenger I'd go below—and stick there."

"But, you see, I am unaccustomed to this sort of thing, and this is a sensation."

"It strikes me you'll have a few more sensations before you see the last of this packet."

His narrow, beady eyes glistened into mine, and something very like a sneer stole up from his ugly mouth. Then without more ado he slouched off forward, steadying himself from time to time by means of the bulwarks. I watched him duck to avoid the flying showers of spray—watched him carefully tread his way until he reached the bridge and disappeared.

This was my first conversation with the mate, and I must admit it did nothing to alter the opinion which I had previously formed of him. And, after all, what did it matter to me if that worthy officer were of the rough and ready order? Our acquaintanceship would last, at the longest, till we reached Manila. So I thought. It was to last a little longer.

About ten minutes after the mate had disappeared forward, and while I yet clung to one of the mizzen stays watching the swirling of the sea, I became aware of an unusual presence near me, and turning round, I beheld a big Chinaman standing in the doorway of the deckhouse. I looked at him and he looked at me, and I saw a smile steal from his little black eyes right down to his ugly mouth. For a Chinaman he was an exceedingly well built fellow, and though apparently approaching middle age and getting somewhat stout, was of an appearance which would command respect in any company. His dress was of the usual coolie pattern—a loose blouse, and short, wide

breeches; though instead of being barefooted he wore a pair of huge sea boots which came right up to his knees. On his head was a soft, peaked cap, under which he had curled his pigtail.

"Hallo!" said I, "what are you doing here?"

He shook his head and grinned, though he knew as well as I that he had no right aft.

"Nothin', cap'n."

"I suppose you know you're not allowed here?"

"No sabbee, cap'n."

I pointed forward.

"You sabbee forward."

"No sabbee folward, cap'n," said the fellow.

"You sabbee this?" and I pointed to the toe of my boot.

His brows contracted, and his upper lip came down.

"Sabbee."

"Then if you don't want to feel the weight of it—clear."

Here I ought to confess that I am not a very formidable fellow to look at, though in justice to myself, I must admit that my appearance rather belies me. But in this case it was moral rather than physical force which was necessary. It is, one might say, chiefly by moral force that the white man holds sway over his darker and less fortunate brother; though I don't deny that it is absolutely necessary physically to drub that unfortunate brother first. It was on moral superiority I chiefly depended in my projected attack; yet the way the fellow's hands went up as I approached bespoke an indifference to moral persuasion which was quite revolting. Still, if I may say so without boasting, I have a very deceptive appearance; and, firmly believing in the inferiority of the yellow man, I would undoubtedly have kicked him had not the second mate at that moment stepped in between us.

"What's the matter here?" cried he.

The chow smiled. I turned to explain.

"I fear this fellow is loafing about for no good purpose."

Hayling laid his great hand on the Chinaman's shoulder and swung him round, his face pointing forward.

"That's your quarter of the ship," he said—"get." With that he caught the Celestial a kick that made the great fellow hop.

"Curse you!" howled the Chinaman, in the plainest English I ever heard in my life, and with an agility wonderful in such a big man, he swung round and sprang at the second mate. But Hayling was as quick as he. He stepped back smartly, and like lightning his hands went up. The Chinaman paused, stared venomously at the Australian, then turned about and slunk away forward.

Hayling's face, which in an instant had grown as hard as iron, relaxed immediately, and he turned to me with a smile.

"A nice customer! I wonder where he came from?"

"It seems absurd to say so, but I could swear he came from below."

"From the saloon?" he asked incredulously.

"From the saloon."

This seemed rather to puzzle him. He looked like a man troubled with thought.

"Any one down there?" he asked.

"Only the captain. The mate came up a few minutes ago."

"Curious!" he muttered, under his breath.

"What is?"

"Oh, nothing. I don't think our Celestial friend will come aft again in a hurry."

"Not while you're about, at any rate."

He smiled, but it was a smile not altogether free of anxiety; as, indeed, it could hardly have been if he had seen the malevolent scowl on the big Chinaman's face.

I watched him as he went forward along the slippery decks, and I thought of the way his hands went up and the iron look that leaped to his face. There was skill and knowledge in his quick posturing, and a fierce will behind his prodigious muscle. Yes, assuredly Mr. Hayling was one whom it would be better not to anger.

CHAPTER III.—UNCERTAINTY.

ALL that afternoon the wind blew so hard that the vessel made little headway. Indeed, there was no attempt at forcing her along; throughout the long hours the engines were kept at half speed.

With me the time passed drearily. Having the whole day on my hands, and no one to whom I could speak, I began to wish I had taken Captain Macshiel's advice and waited for one of the regular steamers. As for the captain, he rarely showed up at all, and I did not like to go plaguing the second mate, knowing he would have too little time to rest during such weather. So having nothing else to do, I went below and tried to sleep, anathematizing the delay with all the energy of selfish disappointment.

Towards evening the wind went down, and by nine or ten o'clock the moon came out and the sea grew comparatively smooth, at least smooth enough to let us continue our way at full speed. And yet, though I listened anxiously for the quicker beat of the screw, and paid sundry visits to the engine room skylight to watch the slow moving machinery, that quicker beat never came, and those huge cranks continued to revolve in their own majestic fashion.

I caught a glimpse of the mate as he was passing aft, and hurrying after him inquired the reason of our slow progression; but he only grinned and told me to go and ask the captain. This I thought highly uncivil; for the monotony of the day, coupled with a vague mysteriousness which seemed to pervade the ship, was fast driving me into a fit of nervous irritation. Anything to relieve the dullness would have been welcome; even the advent of the big Chinaman aft with the request for saloon accommodation. I smoked in solitude until I got tired of the pipe, and then I was glad to creep below and turn in.

I was in no hurry to get up next morning, though I saw by the flashing

on the glass of the port that the sun was shining, and I knew by the steadiness that the sea had gone down, and that the ship was riding on an even keel. To my surprise, though, I still heard the slow crunch, crunch of the screw, which told me that we had not yet increased our speed. At this I must admit I felt exceedingly exasperated, and I had some unconsoling thoughts of the wretched voyage lasting a fortnight.

I sprang out of the bunk, opened the port, and had a peep through. The sea sparkled brightly, and was as smooth as the most ardent landsman could desire; nor, as far as my observation went, was there a cloud in the sky.

I must say that peep at the sea and the sunshine put me in a more charitable mood. I hastily dressed, ate my breakfast, and then went up on deck.

At first I noticed nothing but the extreme placidity of the sea and the delicious fragrance of the air; but presently my attention was attracted by an unwonted bustle which was going on forward. Moved by curiosity, I walked thither, and there beheld the crew rigging up a cannon of considerable dimensions. I don't know much about cannon myself, but this seemed of a fair size and capable of discharging a considerable projectile. I saw that it was mounted on a carriage, that it was a breechloader, and evidently of the latest patteru.

I admit I failed to see the object of so much unnecessary labor. What had a dirty little tramp like the Pulo Way to do with breechloading cannon or any of the paraphernalia of dreadful war? It was, in its way, a surprise; but a greater one was in store for me when I discovered that the director of ceremonies, or superintendent in chief, was no less a person than the big Chinaman whom the second mate had kicked so unceremoniously the day before. His great form loomed up plainly on the forecastle head, and I saw by his gestures that he not only was deeply absorbed in his work, but that he also knew something about it. The captain was there with his mate, but he seemed to have handed over all authority to the big Chinaman. I was not near enough to hear what the big fellow said, as I stood under the bridge; but I followed his every movement with interest, and I thought that the men worked with an unusual energy.

For the life of me I couldn't see the fun of playing thus at warships, and from personal knowledge I can disprove the fallacy that coming events cast their shadows before: The real object of our gun mounting never so much as entered my head.

Presently the captain descended the fo'c'sle steps and came towards me. In one hand he held a formidable looking marlinespike, in the other a length of teased out rope.

"Good morning, captain," said I. "Are you going to turn the Pulo Way into a man o' war?"

He shot a quick, inquiring look out of his little pale eyes, while a curious smile curled the tip of his parrot beak. He scratched amid his neck whiskers with the point of the marlinespike.

"Well," he answered slowly, "finding the voyage a wee bit monotonous, we're just thinking of trying our hand at a little shooting."

"Shooting ! At what ?"

"Well, perhaps it may be albatrosses, or perhaps it may not be. You can never tell. It's just what you're not wanting that'll come all the way to meet you."

"But surely you don't get albatrosses in these latitudes ?"

"Did I say it would be albatrosses ? You understand—I merely go on supposition. For all I know to the contrary, we may be shooting sharks."

"Well, look out that you don't shoot yourselves."

"I think you may go to sleep without dreaming on our account. You see, it's a wee bit of metal we're taking over for the Spaniards, and we just thought we'd like to test it for them."

Again he scratched his neck fringe, and then playfully rubbed the teased out end of the rope in among his black whiskers. But his little pale eyes fixed themselves on my face with a look so intensely piercing, that I had to turn from him and pretend to watch the men on the fo'c'sle.

He in the mean time passed behind me and mounted the bridge, and in a moment or two after I saw him go over to the other side and speak with Hayling. What he said I could not hear ; but judging from the grave look on the second mate's face, it seemed of much importance. Truly, I had not liked the look of Captain Macshiel, nor were his facetious replies to my questions such as met with my approval. Still, when the king condescends to joke, one must hold one's sides with laughter.

I leaned just under the break of the bridge, with my back against one of the stanchions which supported it. In this position I had a full view of the work that was going on forward ; if I turned my head a little to the right and looked up, I could see Hayling if he happened to be leaning over the rail in the starboard corner. Indeed, we had exchanged several smiles and nods, and it was his serious face, looking towards the cannon, which first made me regard with suspicion the work that was going on there. Plainly, I saw that he did not approve of it, and it made me ask myself the question why ?

But, to be candid, at the time the business did not seem of much moment, and I watched the proceedings merely because I had nothing else to do. Occasionally I looked up at Hayling and smiled ; but, indifferent as I was, I thought each time I saw him that his grim face grew grimmer.

As I said, I was leaning against the stanchion just under the break of the bridge, my pipe in my mouth, my eyes fixed on the men forward, who were rapidly getting the gun into position, when all at once I happened to look up at the starboard corner. There was Hayling partly hanging over the rail, a look of fear and warning in his face. My eyes plainly asked what was the matter, and he replied by shaking his head backwards—a quick, sharp movement which I read as expressing haste and fear. Instantly I drew back, subject to an involuntary impulse, and as I did so a marlinespike fell hissing at my feet and struck with a dull thud into the deck. Had I not moved on the second, the heavy instrument would have crashed through my skull.

For a time I trembled like a woman, a shivering sensation sweeping me

from head to foot. Then, with a devout "Thank God!" I stepped out from under the bridge and encountered the penitent face of the captain.

"You're not hurt, Mr. Ravensford?"

"No, not this time."

"That's lucky," said he. "The thing slipped like water through my fingers. Watching the fo'c'sle yonder, I quite forgot what I had in my hand. Ay, indeed, it might have been very serious."

"Rather. You see, the thing came down *point* first;" and I went and pulled it out of the deck where it still stood.

"Indeed, and just think of that!" said he, evidently much alarmed. "And *point* first! Why, man, had it struck you it would have made shark's meat of you in half a jiff. I cannot congratulate myself too much—or you."

"It is the unexpected that happens, Captain Macshiel. For the future I shall be more careful of marlinespikes;" and with that I handed him up the heavy, ugly weapon. His eyes gleamed strangely as they looked down into mine, and the hand that he stretched forth trembled visibly. But sickening excitement prevented a more analytical scrutiny. My heart still beat violently; every pulse in me was going at top speed.

I looked up at Hayling, and got a rare glad smile from him.

"A close thing," said he.

"Very."

Then he turned away, but not without giving me a warning look.

I made my way aft, feeling but ill at ease. The dropping of the marlinespike was a thing that might easily have happened, and, perhaps there was no reason why I should have removed this from the ordinary category of accidents; but as I thought over the warning nod from Hayling I grew full of strange conjecture. Things seemed a bit topsy turvy aboard the Pulo Way. What with mounting cannon under the immediate supervision of the big coolie, whom I seemed to have some instinctive reason for mistrusting; the unwillingness to take me as a passenger, and the promiscuous dropping of marlinespikes, *point* downwards, I had much troubled thought to engage my mind. Nor was that mind likely to be appeased till I had a good talk with the second mate, whose strange face seemed to haunt me.

Just after eight bells, or twelve o'clock, the captain came aft, after having, in conjunction with Hayling, taken the sun. Five minutes or so later the screw began to revolve rapidly, and on looking over the side I saw that we were going at full speed. So much, at least, was gratifying. With a continuance of this weather a couple of days at most ought to see us steaming into Manila harbor, when I, for one, would not be sorry to say good by to the Pulo Way and all aboard of her, with, perhaps, the exception of Hayling. Something told me that he was different from the others, and I felt that we ought to know each other better.

Slowly the afternoon passed, the ship making good progress. On two or three occasions I tried to get a word with the second mate, but he seemed purposely to avoid me; and not doubting that he had good cause for what he did, I inconvenienced him as little as possible. But once, as he passed

me on the deck, he whispered, "Come to my room tonight." He did not turn his head as if addressing me, nor did he pause for a second in his stride. At this I wondered, but before my wonder left me he had passed on, and I had no chance to speak. Looking forward, I caught a glimpse of the mate, who was on the bridge. As he saw me look up he slid away, and the funnel immediately hid him; but I knew that he had been watching Hayling, and I continued to conjecture.

CHAPTER IV.—WHITHER SAILING?

ABOUT five o'clock that afternoon, as I sat aft by the wheelhouse reading, I was startled by the report of a cannon, and on hurrying forward I saw that Captain Macshiel, the mate, and the big coolie were testing the newly erected piece of ordnance. Even as I watched I saw the Chinaman load, take aim, and then discharge the weapon. Looking away out over the bows, I beheld the shell strike the water some distance ahead.

This was shark shooting with a vengeance, only where were the sharks? I puzzled much, being quite at a loss to comprehend the situation.

The captain saw me, and, waving his hand, advanced.

"She's a bonnie bit of baggage," he grinned.

"Who is?" I asked, rather abruptly, resenting the man's tone.

He nodded towards the gun. "She's a winsome lassie, no doubt of it; and our gunner declares he can hit the dorsal fin of a shark a thousand yards off."

"A wonderful fellow, indeed. Who is he?"

"That's just what I cannot tell you."

"Then where did he learn his gunnery?"

"It's a secret, man—a secret that he absolutely refuses to disclose; but I'm just waiting to worm it out of him, and when I do I'll tell you all about it."

Not having any particular regard for him or his humor, I smiled rather sullenly and made my way aft, where I managed to pass the time rather badly till tea was announced. As only the mate and I took it together, the meal was not unduly prolonged. Mr. Murrell—for that was the gentleman's name—did not make half a dozen remarks all the time we were at the table.

Going up on deck, I lit my pipe, heroically resolved to wait patiently till such time as I could with safety make my way to Hayling's cabin; for you may be sure I was crammed full of curiosity.

Slowly the time passed. I saw the mate go forward, and then, after what seemed a considerable period, he came aft again with the captain. Then the two went below, and as I guessed it meant a smoke and a glass of grog, I made my way to Hayling's room.

He was evidently awaiting me, for the door opened immediately to my knock, and when he saw me he seemed rather relieved.

"Glad you've come, old man," he said, gripping my hand in his hearty fashion. Then instantly, somewhat to my surprise, he locked the door and drew the curtain over it.

"Hullo!" said I, "what's the meaning of this?"

"A mere precautionary measure," he replied.

I looked at him without speaking, and he returned the look with interest. It was the steadiest gaze I have ever encountered; a clear, masterful look, that almost seemed to compel honesty. Apparently satisfied, he smiled, handed me a cigar, and lit one himself.

"Well," he queried, ejecting a huge cloud of smoke, through which I saw the steady radiance of his grave eyes, "what do you think of the Pulo Way?"

"I am beginning to think some very queer things. I admit, Captain Macshiel is a puzzle."

He seemed to think so, too; but, judging from his reticence, I guessed he was rather afraid to speak. To rid him of suspicion was therefore my first endeavor.

"Look here, Hayling," said I; "you don't know me, and of course I don't know you, but I believe we understand each other. Is that so?"

"Quite;" and he held out his hand. Of one thing I felt sure—no one but a warm hearted man could give such a grip.

"Then, to be candid with you, I have been entertaining some exceedingly grave suspicions as to the good faith of Captain Macshiel and his crew."

"And not without cause, I should say. I'm sorry I ever came aboard."

"And I, though I must admit that Captain Macshiel tried his hardest to prevent me."

Then I told him of my first interview with the skipper of the Pulo Way, and of the many reasons with which that-worthy mariner sought to restrain me from embarking.

"I, too, came on board almost at the last moment," said the second mate. "As it is, we have no real third. One of the chow quartermasters takes the first watch—a surly brute who would skin his own mother for ten dollars. Seems to be rather thick with the big coolie who mounted the cannon. If I were the captain of this ship I'd clap them both in irons."

"By the way, what's the meaning of this cannon? When I asked the captain, he facetiously replied that it was to shoot sharks."

The Australian looked grave.

"If he had said to shoot gulls he might have been nearer the mark."

"Gulls?" I echoed, reading something much more serious in his face.

"Look here, old man," said he; "I know no more about that cannon than you do, nor of the coolie who works it; but I would trust neither. At all events, it is the first time I ever heard of a tramp aping a man o' war, and I don't like it."

"What, then, is your opinion?"

"I have many, some of them madly absurd. Yet there is one thing of which I can speak with absolute certainty." Here he stopped, and even in the privacy of his own room, with door locked and curtain drawn, looked round and lowered his voice: "*We are not steering towards Manila!*"

I could scarcely credit my hearing, but looked at him in a way that forced him to repeat the sentence.

"You are sure?"

"As sure as mortal man can be. If, as I understand, this ship was to go direct to Manila, I can assure you, on my honor, that she is not pointing that way at present."

"Certainly she was to go direct to Manila. That's why I came by her. Where else should she be going?"

"When I left the bridge her nose was pointing more to the south and west."

"And where would that lead us?"

"To the Mindoro Strait, far to the south of Manila."

"And where and what the deuce is the Mindoro Strait?"

"It is the channel the Australian ships take on their way up from Port Darwin."

"But perhaps Captain Macshiel has made a mistake? Remember, yesterday was dead reckoning."

"True; that's why I didn't speak yesterday; but today we got the sun."

"And did you take it?"

"I did."

I could see no way out of it. There was no earthly reason why I should doubt the accuracy of Hayling's statement, though inclination may have led me to modify it. He had worked out our position, and by what I could gather he was a man who thoroughly understood navigation. Truly, he had set my mind buzzing.

"Well," said I, befogged completely, and just a trifle eager to find my way, "what the deuce does it mean?"

For a time he was silent, pulling thoughtfully at his cigar. Then he looked me earnestly in the face.

"Captain Macshiel tried to persuade you not to join this ship?"

"Indeed, yes. At first I thought he would not have me at any price, which so annoyed me that I had half a mind to take another vessel."

"It's a pity you didn't."

"Why?"

"It's plain that you were not wanted; it's doubly plain now that you are in the way."

"I? My dear fellow, how can I be in the way?"

He looked mighty serious. His mouth formed into a rigid line, and his heavy brows came together in a deep furrow.

"Good-God!" he cried suddenly. And then, as if ashamed of himself, he added, in an apologetic tone, "But, of course, it can't be!"

Startled at this abrupt outburst, I eyed him uneasily.

"What can't be?" I asked.

"Look here," said he; "I don't want to frighten you, and it might have been an accident; but have you forgotten the marlinespike?"

"On the contrary, I have thought of it incessantly. Had it not been for you the thing would have brained me."

"Understand, I lay no charge against Captain Macshiel; but I thought he handled the thing carelessly, and I saw your danger."

It was now my turn to blanch. What if that which I had regarded as an accident had really been premeditated? It was enough to make one wish one's self safe at home.

I sprang up and foolishly declared that I would go at once to the captain and wring the truth from him, the wizened little wretch; but level headed Hayling said that I would do nothing of the kind, and he accordingly pushed me back on the settee and handed me my grog. After all, we were only going on supposition, and the marlinespike might have fallen by accident.

"But he cannot deny that the ship is not pointing towards Manila?"

"You forget that he is captain, and can sail his ship in his own way."

"Then what do you really think?"

"To be candid with you, Ravensford, I have so many thoughts that they bewilder me. But my advice to you is—be careful. Don't stand too near an open hatch, or wander about the decks at night. I don't say that you are positively in danger; but you must admit that Captain Macshiel did not want you, and you know from experience that accidents will happen."

This is a pretty business, thought I; and as an occasional shiver ran down my back, I seemed to realize the awful iniquity of man. Convinced that there was some devil's project brewing aboard, I questioned Hayling concerning the cannon forward and the big coolie. But he knew no more than I. Like me, he had watched the preparations, and, like me, he had marveled at the sight; but he had not been taken into the confidence of either the captain or the mate, and what he imagined concerned only himself.

"But," said I, "if you are not one of them, is not your danger as great as mine?"

"The mate has already sounded me," he admitted; "but as I am not entirely without a certain amount of perception, and may, perhaps, possess a trifle of duplicity, he retired with little to his credit beyond a vague hope. Moreover, they find me useful."

"Well," I said, "I don't know what's in the air, but I feel there's something dashed bad. Whatever happens, we stand together—eh?"

"Yes," said he, and stretched out his hand to mine.

Just then the handle of the door was twisted violently, and the door itself shaken till I thought it would come in. This demonstration was immediately followed by a fierce rat-tat. Hayling sprang across and unlocked the door, which, upon being opened, disclosed the distorted face of Murrell, the chief mate.

With an oath he inquired why the door was locked. and then, seeing me, he blurted out:

"Hullo, what are you doing here?"

Not liking his tone, I fired up and asked him what the deuce it had to do with him.

"Only that it's the second mate's watch below. You passengers seem to forget the men who keep watch while you are soundly snoring. I'll tell you what it is, Hayling, the old man doesn't like this sort of thing."

"Well," said Hayling, with a good natured smile, "when I am found to be incapable of doing my duty, it will be time for the old man to talk."

"Ah, but you don't know the old man," grinned the chief. "He does first and talks afterwards. No hanky panky aboard the Pulo Way."

"Won't you come in?" said Hayling; for all this time the mate had lounged in the doorway, the curtain clutched in one hand, his ferrety little eyes darting suspicious glances all over the room.

"Thanks. I want a word or two with you."

He favored me with a most significant look. But I was already on my feet, and as the curtain fell behind me, I heard him say, "What sort of a mug is that?" Curious as was the expression, I knew to whom he referred.

CHAPTER V.—THE MYSTERY INCREASES.

As I groped my way along the dark deck I thought of Hayling's warning, and realized how easily two or three men might spring upon a man and toss him overboard. The thought was not pleasant, nor was I the more relieved when I beheld a form flit hurriedly by the engine room skylight. For a moment I entertained some singularly unpleasant thoughts, then rapidly made my way aft and went below.

There could be no longer any doubt as to the serious aspect of things—an aspect which was none the less terrifying on account of the scarcity of real knowledge. So, being full of the warning of my friend the second mate, and beset with vague suspicion, I fished out a revolver from the bottom of my big trunk, carefully loaded it, and then placed the weapon beneath my pillow. I was not a warlike man, and prayed devoutly that there would be no demand for firearms; but I had only one life to lose, and though not the best of lives, it was the best I had.

It was a long time before I got to sleep, but when I did I slept soundly enough, never waking till the steward knocked at my door to tell me it was time to get up. Then, jumping out and looking through the port, I saw that the sun was already high, and that the ship had been slowed down again. Exasperated beyond all measure, I dressed hurriedly and scrambled up on deck, eager to question the captain concerning this further delay. But, to my chagrin, no one was in sight, and of course I was not allowed to mount the bridge. A good ten minutes of angry pacing up and down followed, during which time I saw the captain and the mate perched up in the starboard corner of the bridge intently sweeping the sea with their glasses. At the same moment I beheld Hayling coming aft, and being sure that he had seen me, I slipped behind the deckhouse, a position which hid me from the men forward.

Presently he swung round the corner and came towards me, smiling somewhat recklessly, I thought.

"Well," said he, "had a good night?"

"I suppose so."

He laughed; but this time the white teeth shone out from behind his dark mustache.

"You're a mysterious beggar, Hayling."

"Not in the least."

"Can you tell me why we have slowed down?"

"I cannot."

"Nothing wroug with the engines?"

"I should say not, since they are kept going."

"But the engineer may be afraid to send them along at full speed?"

"He may."

"But you doubt it?"

"I do."

He was coldly, horribly laconic.

"Tell me, are we still steering *from* Manila?"

"Yes. Just go to the side and take a peep over the starboard bow."

Doing as I was bidden, I thought I saw an unusual swirling of waters some distance ahead. Returning to him, I put the question:

"What is that yonder?"

"The Scarborough Shoal," said he.

"And we ought to be nowhere near it?"

"Nowhere."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite; even though the old man has locked me out of the chart room."

"But do ships never come this way to go to Manila?"

"Not so far to the westward. We are in the track of the Australian ships—of one coming from Port Darwin to Hong Kong. If her skipper knows his road he will come up the Molucca Passage, through the Celebes and Sulu Seas, and so on into the China Sea by the Mindoro Strait. We have no right where we are, and if Captain Macshiel is not a fool he has come for a certain purpose."

"What purpose?" I queried.

He looked very serious.

"That I don't know, but I believe we are afloat in very strange company."

Just then the captain appeared round the corner of the deckhouse, and when he saw Hayling his ragged brows instantly contracted. A look of intense annoyance swept his face; but the next moment he greeted me with one of his pleasantest smiles. Hayling touched his cap and moved away.

The captain watched him without speaking; then turning to me, said:

"Yonder fellow might make himself a bit more agreeable, considering how he loves a gossip."

"I merely asked him why we were going slow, and what shoal that was out yonder."

"And he told you?"

"He couldn't tell me why we were going slow, but he said the shoal was the Scarborough."

"Nothing more, I suppose?"

"No, nothing much. By the way, captain, is there anything wroug with the engines?"

"That's just it," said he. "The bearings got so mortal hot that the engineer had to slow down. It's annoying—extremely annoying."

"But is that really the Scarborough yonder?"

"Maybe," said he dryly. "And why not the Scarborough as well as anything else?"

"Because, if it is, we who are bound for Manila ought to be nowhere near it."

"So, so," he grinned, "that hulking brute has been talking, eh? Well, he's very clever, no doubt; but supposing the Scarborough is a little bit off the straight line, it is the safe way, and the one I always take."

I bowed. What more was there to be said? A man must sail his ship in his own way.

"And when do you think we ought to reach Maui?"

"That I can't say for certain. It will depend chiefly on the engineer."

Again his cadaverous face wrinkled itself into an insinuating grin, and with an awkward attempt at ease he shuffled below, leaving me full of perplexity and doubt, though doubt of his honesty I had none. His excuses were so palpably insincere that only his intense love of subterfuge could have prompted him to utter them.

Yet shortly after this the engines were set going at full speed once again, and were kept at a high pressure all through that night and well on into the next afternoon, until we sighted land. Then, when I was once more beginning to entertain the vague hope of reaching my destination, they stopped suddenly. I hurried forward to the engine room skylight and looked down, but beyond a greaser or two who were oiling and polishing up, I could see nothing.

As I walked disconsolately aft, the captain overtook me.

"Upon my soul," he whined, looking at me in a way that was anything but complimentary, "the very devil himself seems to have boarded us this voyage! Never in my life have I encountered such a run of bad luck. I doubt much if we shall reach Manila Bay inside this week."

"The engines have broken down, then?" said I, inwardly anathematizing the delay.

"Badly. May the devil toast the man who invented engines!"

"But of course you can mend them?"

"That remains to be seen. Our engineer is a clever enough chap, a Portuguese from Macao; but he has neither the appliances nor the men."

I walked away feeling at war with the world, ruing the mad obstinacy which had made me join this ship against my better sense. Yet calmer reason offered an excuse for the madness of my choice.

All the rest of that day we lay idly rolling on the sea, and as every one to whom I could have spoken had managed to stow himself away, I underwent an extremely wretched experience.

In appearance the Pulo Way was an ordinary sort of tramp, with a raised fore-castle and stern and a deep well amidships. I have mentioned the fore-castle, on which the gun was mounted; in the stern this raised structure, which formed a short poop, from which the flag trailed on Sundays when the ship was in port, was known as the wheelhouse. Here were the big hand wheels, which were to be used in case anything went wrong with the steam steering gear.

Into this wheelhouse, then, the front of which had two large glass windows, which in turn were duly protected by two stout teak shutters, which slid into grooves on either side, I popped to light my pipe. Finding it more comfortable there than out in the keen night wind, I settled myself on an old piece of sail cloth, and sat thinking and smoking in the dark.

Presently I was aroused by hearing the hoarse laugh of the mate as that worthy approached. What had been said to make him laugh I could not tell; but the jocular outburst was followed by the captain saying, in a surly tone:

"You may laugh, Murrell, but I'd like to feel as certain of the job as you do."

"Pooh, man!" replied the mate—and I thought his voice sounded exceedingly familiar. "You're not getting squeamish, are you?"

The captain laughed constrainedly as he said:

"Perhaps, a bit. Any way, it's a ticklish job, and I wish it was well over. There's an element of uncertainty about the thing that doesn't suit me. Then there's the second mate and this numskull of a passenger."

"He that is not for me is against me," quoted the mate mockingly. "Leave them to me."

Again the captain laughingly replied, and in imagination I pictured his ugly little face, the malicious twinkle of his narrow eyes.

Here the mate poked his head into the wheelhouse to light his pipe, while I shrank further back into the shadow, uneasy to a degree. I drew my breath in and held it fast; but the light in the man's eyes dazzled him so that he could not look beyond. After a few vigorous draws he turned again to his companion.

"I do not deny that what you call the element of uncertainty exists," he said. "But Gupp and I have gone so carefully into this that there can be little doubt of our success. It is a thousand to one she will pass through the Mindoro Strait. From there to Hong Kong is a straight line, and as we are on that line she *must* pass us."

"But what if she passes us at night?"

"We shall see her just the same."

The captain made some reply, the tone of which implied considerable doubt, but what he said I could not catch, as the men moved off together.

For a time I remained plunged deeply in thought, a whole battalion of conjectures stampeding through my mind. That the mate referred to some ship was apparent, while, curious to relate, in describing her movements he had employed almost the identical words made use of by Hayling.

Needless to say, this conversation caused me considerable apprehension, especially as I had long since begun to doubt the good faith of Captain Macshiel. That we had purposely come out of our way, and for no righteous cause, I feared, was now self evident. Certain it was that the captain expected to meet a ship in this neighborhood, but for a good or an evil purpose who should say? What that purpose really was I did not even dream of then, it being one of those awful things which would never enter into the calculations of an ordinary person.

But what I had easily grasped, and what, indeed, I had long since known, was the fact that my presence on board the Pulo Way did not meet with the approval of the captain or his mate; and if my imaginings were not wholly vain, I expected some personal assurance of it before long.

Another thing that puzzled me was the mention of the name Gupp. Who and what was Gupp? And what had he to do with this enterprise? Here I was entirely nonplussed, for I knew that from the officers to engineers no one on board had such a name. I was naturally forced to conclude that Mr. Gupp was a gentleman who had given good advice and stayed behind in Hong Kong. Wise Mr. Gupp; I envied him his wisdom.

But I was to learn more of him the next morning. About half past ten, as I sat alternately reading and watching the water break on the island just abeam of us, to which we had drawn very near during the night, Hayling came aft, and when opposite me he stopped.

"Morning," he said. "Have you seen our new third?"

"New third?" I echoed.

"Yes; a most tremendous surprise. A gentleman by the name of Gupp."

This was too much for me. I sprang excitedly from my chair.

"You're joking, Hayling."

"Honor bright," said he. "Go forward yourself and you'll see him marching up and down the bridge as large as life."

"Who is this mau?"

"Hanged if I know. The captain brought him forward this morning and introduced him as 'Mr. Gupp, our new third officer.' It was not my business to ask who Mr. Gupp was or where the deuce he sprang from."

"But you guess who he is?"

"Yes. If I am not mistaken, he is the big coolie who mounted the gun forward;" and with that he slipped from my side and passed aft to the wheelhouse, but so suddenly that I looked round to see the cause.

The captain had just come up from below.

I strolled forward to have a peep at Mr. Gupp, and saw a big, stout man, with a fat, clean shaven face. I couldn't get a very close look at him, but what I saw did not impress me. Truly, the Pulo Way was a strange ship, and I guessed instinctively that the curtain was about to rise on the first act of a stranger drama.

CHAPTER VI.—LUIZ THE PORTUGUEE.

FOR the next two days we lay idly floating upon the water, apparently as helpless as a log, though, curious to relate, the ship never seemed to drift within a dangerous distance of the land. Indeed, more than once during my half waking slumbers I dreamed that the engines were going slowly; but that, according to official statement, was an utter impossibility. And yet I doubted that it was all a dream.

During this time I could not have spoken more than half a dozen words to Captain Macshiel. He seemed purposely to avoid me, and whenever I

broached the subject of our delay he grew so exceedingly irritable that he never even took the trouble to be civil. I could see that his anxiety was playing the deuce with him, and that he shared none of the jaunty confidence of Murrell, or the new third officer, Mr. Gupp. Within the last two days that worthy had become quite a familiar figure on the quarter deck of the Pulo Way, and I saw with no little uneasiness that he exercised a considerable influence over the more vacillating captain. This coupled with long conferences and much drink, brought about such a shocking state of discipline that I could not have been surprised to see the crew walk aft in a body and demand saloon accommodation.

As for Mr. Gupp, he puzzled me greatly. I was sure that I had met him before the advent of the big coolie. That he had masqueraded as the latter was obvious. There were the unmistakable face and figure, coupled with which was the disappearance of the coolie to account for, and Mr. Gupp's undoubted affection for the gun forward. I seemed to have met the man somewhere—to have come in contact with him in some way or other—but where or how I could not tell. Sometimes I was sure he knew and understood my thoughts.

On the afternoon of the second day, as I took my constitutional up and down the deck, I saw the captain, Murrell, and Gupp upon the bridge, each with a glass in his hand, with which, at short intervals, he swept the distant horizon. What the men expected to see I guessed well enough, and as I approached them I caught many eager exclamations; but I resumed my walk up and down as though oblivious of their presence. What they did, or what they intended to do, was no concern of mine, and so I was determined to show them.

Yet as I walked forward I noticed that the captain held in his hand a little slip of paper; while the mate, a large sheet of paper before him, upon which he had evidently drawn some figures or designs, was pointing from one piece of paper to the other and speaking very earnestly. Then the captain grew excited and waved his slip in the mate's face. As he did so the thing slid from his fingers and the wind caught it and blew it towards me. I saw it take an ominous flutter outwards, and I feared it would go overboard. Quickly springing forward, I made a grab and caught it just in time. I heard some one call from the bridge, "Here, you, hand that over!"

What I had caught was merely a newspaper cutting; but as I felt my fingers close upon it I suddenly remembered that when I first saw Captain Macshiel he was studying such a piece of paper with a big black bearded individual. I also recollected that he hastily crumpled up the slip and hid it away in his pocket. Therefore, acting on some inward suggestion, I straightened it out.

It was a very small cutting, and contained but three or four lines of print. At either end of the paragraph a cross was marked in red pencil. Between the crosses the print said:

The Chung Tong, with the Australian mail on board, left Sydney for Port Darwin and Hong Kong on the 25th inst. Besides a large mail and several passengers, she carries £50,000 in gold.

I had just time to master so much, when the slip was snatched from my fingers. Looking up, I encountered the ugly face of Mr. Gupp.

"Here, you," he cried sharply, "what the blazes do you mean by peeping into other people's property?"

"Why," said I, trying to look as though I had not noticed his tone, "it's only a cutting from a newspaper."

"What if it is? You saw whose it was, didn't you?"

"Oh, go to the devil! I can't talk to you."

"But I'll talk to you," he spluttered, "and in a way you won't like."

I favored him with a look of some contempt; but, truth to tell, I had no great liking for his measure. I hold it imprudent in the extreme for a man wilfully to batter his brains against a wall, even though he may do the wall some little damage. Moreover, my position on board was not so secure that I could afford to give vent to my natural indignation.

Hiding my wrath as best I could, I called in discretion, and beat an immediate retreat. The fellow went forward, muttering vaguely to himself. The fact is, the reading of that newspaper cutting had caused me intense agitation, and as I walked aft I saw the Pulo Way engaged in one of the most daring adventures of these or of any other times. So daring was it, so almost impossible, and so sure of awful punishment, that I declined to entertain the idea; though by an unbroken chain of reasoning and conjecture my inmost sense had made the matter absolutely convincing.

I turned in early that night, having vainly sought a word or two with Hayling. I wanted to tell him what I had read, what were my suspicions, and hear him deliver judgment in his cool, clear way. But it seemed as though a guard had been set about his cabin, for whenever I approached it I was sure to encounter the very man I did not wish to meet. So feeling anything but secure about the deck after nightfall, I went below and turned in.

An hour or so after the captain and his officers congregated in the saloon, and what with laughing, singing, and joking they made a pretty hubbub. Whisky and cards I knew were going, and by the smell of things tobacco was likewise in evidence.

I was just flattering myself that the rascals had forgotten all about me, when some one gave the handle of my door a sudden twist. But after my first serious talk with Hayling I had taken the precaution of turning the lock. An oath proclaimed the disappointment of the would be intruder. I felt under the pillow for my revolver and lay still. The twisting was followed by a loud rat tat, then another oath, and then a savage kick which nearly broke in the panels. Still I thought it better not to answer, which so enraged the besieger that three or four kicks came in quick succession, and the mate's voice was heard crying:

"Hullo! you in there?"

"Hullo!" said I.

"Are you asleep or dead?"

"Neither."

"Then why the deuce don't you speak when you're spoken to?"

"Well, what do you want?"

"The captain is complaining about your unsociability."

"I'm sorry."

He laughed.

"So are we. Won't you come out and join us?"

"I've turned in."

"Well, turn out again."

The laughter of the other men rang out merrily, which convinced me that they were listening to our dialogue, and that they had made up their minds to plague me. Moreover, the drink was aboard, and the brutes might want humoring. It did not take me half a minute to make up my mind.

"Very well. I'll be out in a second."

I slipped on a coat over my pyjamas, nor did I forget to drop my pistol into one of the pockets. Then quickly opening the door, I stepped out into the saloon with a jauntiness I was far from feeling.

At the head of the table sat Captain Macshiel. On one side of him was Mr. Gupp, on the other a dark, downy, foreign looking man, whom I knew to be the chief engineer. Murrell, the mate, stood by the sideboard just behind the captain. Before each man was a tumbler of whisky and water, and as each was pulling vigorously at a Manila cheroot, the density of the atmosphere may be imagined.

I was greeted with uproarious cries of welcome. A cigar was shoved between my lips, a bottle of whisky placed in one hand and a tumbler in the other.

"There you are, my lad," cried the captain, whose little eyes were all aglow with devilment, or whisky, which is the same thing. "Drink up, like a man. Here's to the good ship Pulo Way and the good things she means to do."

At this there was a great pretense of hurrahing, though I could see that it was all done for my benefit. Glasses were clicked, and the Portuguese began a Portuguese version of "For he's a jolly good fellow." Having no objection to drinking such a toast, I supplemented it with, "And here's to her captain and crew, and may they die peacefully in their beds like honest men!"

The toast might easily have been less ambiguous, though being in an irritable mood, I cared little. Still, it was received in a way which made me doubt its wisdom; for your rogue always harbors the absurd hope that he will be mistaken for an honest man. Two or three pairs of eyes fairly glared at me, and then the captain burst into a ringing laugh.

"Good!" he cried. "Capital! We are all honest men here, Mr. Ravensford, and I have no doubt that we shall die peacefully in our beds."

Gupp looked at the Portuguese and whispered; but the captain, smiling graciously, struck a match, and held it to my cheroot. Then he motioned me to a seat beside him, and, taking up a pack of cards from the table, suggested that we should have a game. As I could not well refuse, I immediately agreed. Something told me that this was a crucial moment

of my life, and I settled down to play with these men, feeling as I had never felt before.

At first the game, which was loo, went smoothly enough, the captain and the mate, between whom I sat, chatting affably all the time, and plying me with whisky. Gupp and the Portugee did little but drink and smoke, and watch the captain furtively, as if for a sign. I saw it plainly; and I knew that presently either Gupp or the engineer, whom they called Luiz, would introduce a little variety.

But in the mean time Macshiel concentrated his whole attention on me, broaching many subjects which I had a special reason for avoiding. Indeed, had I not been the possessor of sundry scruples which had clung to me from childhood, I would have been more eager to hear of the fortune which the skipper declared was mine for the asking. I knew that fortune, and guessed the way he intended to acquire it; but I played the dullard with exasperating politeness.

By degrees the game grew noisier, and I, who had been drinking rather freely, caught the infection. I cannot speak with certainty, but I believe the excitement had as much to do with my elation as the whisky. Any way, between the two, my nervousness wore off, and I chatted and laughed as though I were one of them. But though I did not pay as much attention to the game as, in the nature of things, I ought, I still had a sort of vague idea that Gupp and the Portugee were doing a little hanky panky on their own account. This idea presently became a certainty, and when Luiz led the king of clubs, the very card I held in my hand, which the mate had just dealt me, I tossed it over to the Portugee, saying:

"Perhaps you'd like a pair of them, my man."

With that I rose from the table.

The fellow also rose, and glaring furiously at me, he cried, in his hollow, throaty, Portuguese way:

"What do you mean by that, you dog?"

In a moment I saw the drift of things—saw how this climax had been systematically led up to. But my own boldness amazed me.

"I mean," said I, "that you're a rogue, and I refuse to play with you."

"Rogue! You call me rogue, you dog!" he screamed. "I kill you, by heaven! I kill you!"

He raved and howled like a madman, and I wondered much why he did not fly at me.

"Come, come," said Macshiel; "this is a serious charge, Mr. Ravensford. I think you had better apologize before it goes any further."

"That man is a cheat, and I refuse to apologize."

"But Luiz is very excitable," he whispered confidentially, and yet with a meaning which I guessed. "He may hurt you."

"Or I him."

"Vat you say?" shrieked the fellow, his horrid black eyes working convulsively, his face livid with rage.

"I say that you're a confounded scoundrel, and for two pias I'd kick you out of the saloon."

His hand, which I had noticed him slip round to his hip, was here brought to view, and in it he held a sailor's long sheath knife. With a savage cry he leaned across the table as if to stab me. But I had guessed his intention, and was prepared. Drawing quickly, I had him covered.

"If you move another inch, I'll fire!"

The fellow stood transfixed, his ugly eyes peering into the barrel of the revolver, which could not have been two feet from his forehead.

"Now, drop that knife—drop it, or, by heaven, I'll put a bullet through you!"

Caught as he was, and seeing the determination in my face, his horrid, thick lips twitched convulsively. With an angry gesture he flung the knife upon the table, where it stuck quivering.

"Now, get out of this," I said, "and see that you keep out of it while I'm here."

All this was so sudden, so unexpected, that Macshiel and his companions looked on with wonder, nor did they once raise any objection to my dealing so summarily with the engineer. Indeed, for the time being, I was master of the situation, and knowing the nature of my company, I made the most of my power. I therefore assumed a reckless, defiant air, and delivered myself of sundry tremendous oaths; for whereas swearing but lowers a man in decent company, it exalts him in the company of the base. To hear me one would think my blood was scalding hot with indignation, and I flatter myself that I acted admirably the part of a furious fire eater; at least, I was successful. The Portugee retreated step by step, and muttering something in his own disgusting lingo, bolted up the companion.

Turning to the captain, I smiled, and said:

"I must apologize, Captain Macshiel. But the fellow was a rogue—a fact of which you could have had not the least conception."

"Not the least," said he, with a dubious smile. "I had always thought Luiz an exceptionally honest fellow, as he is undoubtedly a first class engineer."

"First class," echoed the two subordinates.

"I have no wish to question his abilities as an engineer," said I loftily, "though the frequency with which we have broken down might lay him open to suspicion. For myself, I have no great liking for foreign scum, and I prefer not to meet it."

Having gone so far, I thought it just as well to carry things with a high hand. To have faltered then would have been fatal.

"Luiz must have been very drunk," said Macshiel, an uneasy smile flickering across his face. "I always knew he was inclined to be quarrelsome, but I had no idea he could so far forget himself. You are sure you are not mistaken in the cards?"

"Quite. Your friend Luiz may be an excellent specimen of the engineer, but he is not a good card player."

"No," said he significantly; "I'm afraid he's not. Any way, I'm glad he didn't hurt you."

The skipper grinned unpleasantly, while his two officers stared uneasily

at each other, their rogues' faces lined with anxiety. That they were totally unprepared for such a turn of affairs was obvious; indeed, their disappointment was strongly marked. One wrong move would have set fire to their smoldering irritation, and I had no wish to come in closer contact with Mr. Gupp just then.

Thinking that I had done creditably under the circumstances, I wished them good night, and with an air of splendid composure went to my room. But I knew that I had precipitated matters, and that henceforth I might expect an open enmity. Surprise and unexpected opposition had given me the victory, or, rather, I had repulsed the enemy, not vanquished him. He would come on again, this time prepared for any contingency. Well, it was a business not at all to my liking, and one I had never expected to enter; but having entered it, and started so well, I gained a little consolation from the thought that I had given my enemy some cause to respect me.

CHAPTER VII.—PIRACY ON THE HIGH SEAS.

I WILL not pretend that I slept well that night. Indeed, for quite two hours after turning in I scarcely attempted to close my eyes, and when I did I saw things which made me hastily open them again. A dozen times I thought I heard some one twisting the handle of my door, and quite as often my imagination enabled me to see the white, swollen face of Gupp flattened against the port. In fact, so many alarms did I pass through, that when I awoke and saw the sun shining I was surprised to find myself alive.

Breakfast, of which I took but sparingly, was spread for me as usual. But I had little inclination to eat. I was more anxious to get up on deck and have a look round.

There was no one about the after part of the vessel, so, lighting my pipe, I leaned against the rail and watched the land, which did not seem to be more than two or three miles off. Indeed, I wondered much at our position, for according to the drift of the current we should long since have been out of sight. I thought of the Portugee and his engines; also of my dreams.

But presently there was great commotion forward. The captain and the mate sprang to the starboard corner of the bridge, their glasses to their eyes. A moment or two of expectancy followed, and then I heard the mate cry out at the top of his great, gruff voice:

"Forward there! All hands forward!"

Then the bo'sun blew his whistle, there was a rushing to and fro, and half a dozen men sprang upon the fo'c'sle. Gupp followed, swearing and giving directions, and I saw the men cover the gun with a great square of canvas, the ends of which were fastened carefully to the deck. Then, much to my surprise, I heard the clank of the engines, and for about half a minute we forged steadily ahead. Then there was silence again, as the ship gradually slowed down and stopped. Needless to say, I understood my dreams at last.

During this little maneuver the captain had hardly lowered his glasses,

and though at first I could make out nothing, gradually a little dark cloud began to form upon the eastern horizon. At first it was so thin and indistinct that I should not have noticed it if left to myself; but as I watched, it perceptibly assumed a deeper shade and stretched further across the heavens. Like a long wisp of cloud it seemed, a thing that had no business in the perfectly clear sky, and as I watched I knew what it meant. It was a cloud, truly, but a cloud of smoke cast up by some steamer which was not yet in sight.

The men all crowded to the starboard side and turned anxiously to the far horizon; even the Portuguese Luiz crawled up from his reeking engine room, and hung his ugly, dirty face over the side. I darted below for my glasses, and while there I slipped a small box of cartridges into my pocket. When I reached the deck again, the topmasts of the steamer were distinctly visible.

I filled my pipe and tried patiently to await the development of events; but though I may have preserved an outward appearance of calm, inwardly I was throbbing with excitement. Each minute that passed seemed multiplied by ten, and when at length the hull of the advancing vessel began to loom up, and I saw that she was coming toward us, I felt as though the fate of the whole world was hanging on the issue.

Presently Hayling came aft, a bundle of flags under his arm, and as he began to knot them to the signaling halyards I crossed over to him. The big fellow looked exceedingly solemn; I felt so. As he nodded to me there was never the ghost of a smile on his hard face.

"What are you going to do, Hayling?"

"Signal to that vessel that we are badly in need of help."

I advanced still closer to him.

"What does this mean, old fellow?"

"Can't you guess?" said he, still busy with the flags.

"I dare not."

He laughed between his teeth.

"My dear Ravensford, we're going to stop that ship, and sink her, too, if she gives any trouble."

"Piracy!"

"That's about it." Again he laughed, and I thought his face looked fiendish.

"What ship is it?" I asked.

"I haven't the faintest notion, but I think you will find that she is bound from Sydney to Hong Kong."

"The Chung Tong left Sydney on the 25th inst. with fifty thousand pounds in gold on board."

"How do you know?" said he sharply.

In as few words as possible I told him how I had become possessed of the information.

"Then depend upon it, Ravensford, that vessel is the Chung Tong."

By this time he had arranged the flags correctly, and just as he was hoisting them the captain, Murrell, and half a dozen men came aft in a body.

Hayling did not look at me, but under his breath I heard him mutter, "Be careful. They are ripe for anything." I slipped my hands into my coat pockets and assumed my best air of indifference. In one of the pockets was a revolver, and my finger instantly curled round the trigger.

The men stood back by the bulwarks, where they formed an evil looking group of cutthroats; Macshiel and the mate advanced.

Looking up at the flags, then at the far off ship, which every minute loomed up clearer, the skipper said, "You see that ship?"

"Yes," I replied.

"Can you guess her name?"

"The Chung Tong," said I, somewhat defiantly.

"Good;" and his devilish face seemed to wrinkle with pleasure. "Perhaps you can also guess where she comes from?"

"Sydney."

"And what she carries?"

"Fifty thousand pounds in gold."

"Where she is bound for?"

"Hong Kong."

"No!"

"Where then?"

"Hades!"

I started, taken clean off my guard. The man's face suddenly grew wrinkled and hideous, like a monkey's, and he seemed passionately to spit the word out.

"I hope not," said I.

"Well," he replied, "it's a pity, of course; but before she goes we are going to ask her to leave her gold behind. It will be of no use in the port she's bound for."

"Melt," grinned the mate.

"None whatever," said I, replying to the captain. "I think yours is a perfectly reasonable request."

"I hope so," said he, with a nasty laugh. "Are you with us?"

"First let me know your project," said I, hoping in a vague sort of way that the time gained might prove beneficial.

"We intend to get hold of that fifty thousand. It ought to set us up for life."

"How many of you?"

His brows went together, and he scowled frightfully. I had spoken rather loudly.

"There is enough for all," said he, in a low, meaning voice.

"But suppose her captain refuses to part with it?"

"We shall make him."

"How?"

"We have a gun forward, and our third mate, Mr. Gupp, was once a gunner in the Royal Navy."

"Then you will sink her unless she surrenders?"

"Precisely."

"It's a desperate enterprise, Captain Macshiel."

He grinned hideously, while the mate and the men began to show signs of impatience. Evidently they thought enough had been said. It was time to act.

The captain, advancing a step nearer, peered into my face.

"Will you join us?"

"But this is piracy."

"Never mind what it is," said he. "Will you join us?"

"No, I will not."

"Then you understand that we have no room for traitors aboard?"

The faces of those before me grew black and threatening, and I really believed a rush was imminent. I covered Macshiel with my concealed pistol, and felt sure that I could put a bullet somewhere through his body. He saw the movement, and, guessing what it meant, stepped back, a livid twitch of terror shooting down his cadaverous jaws. And, truly, at that moment he was bound for the same port as the *Chung Tong*.

An angry look swept into his eyes, and he said, with a horrid grin:

"What have you got your hands in your pockets for?"

"To keep them warm."

"Then up with them. I'm the master here."

"Captain Macshiel," I said, "I have no quarrel with you—I have no wish to quarrel with you. I candidly admit that I am not a fighting man, nor has fighting ever come my way before; but, so help me God, I'll do my best to injure the man who tries to injure me."

It was a bit of bounce, and yet not altogether bounce. I knew the men were desperate, and that they would not hesitate to sacrifice me if I endeavored to thwart them. The alternative was therefore given me—and yet what an alternative! To join them, even against my will, would be to make me equally guilty in the eyes of the law. Not to join them meant that there was no room for me on board the *Pulo Way*. Therefore the bounce was not all bounce; there was a deadly seriousness underlying it as befitted such an occasion, which I think Macshiel was quick to see. Or perhaps the knowledge that between him and a bullet there was only the lining of my coat may have quickened his perception.

"Nobody wants to injure you," said he, with a conciliatory grin. "What the deuce do you take us for? Though driven desperate, we are not wholly without reason. We have cried for justice, but justice is deaf as well as blind. I don't want to prate or preach; but I can tell you that we are just sick of things, and that now we mean to live—to live, by heaven, if it's only for a month!"

So this was a new phase of Captain Macshiel's character. But his sophistries fell on unsympathetic ears.

"To live for a month is good. And after?"

He laughed harshly. "To live still; for we intend to render detection impossible. It's as good as five thousand pounds in your pocket. What do you say?"

"I have said."

"Very well;" and this time he smiled wickedly. "We'll make you one of us yet. Now, lads," cried he, turning to the men, "to quarters. In half an hour we shall be rich men." He waved his hand and drove them forward, while I slunk away aft, a prey to the most distressing emotions.

The ship, a long, low, one funnel boat with a projecting bow, came sweeping up grandly out of the ocean. When she was near enough to read our signal her helm was put over and she bore straight down upon us. Poor beggars! Eager to help, how they would have shunned us had they only known!

On she came, straight for us, like an animal ready to spring over the white hedge of foam which forever seemed to block her way. The red ensign went up, and presently she signaled, "Can I be of any assistance?" The mate came rushing aft, and ran up the pennant "Yes." There followed an immediate bustle aboard the liner, and I saw some men spring to the davits on the port side and begin to clear the falls. Then the wash before her bows subsided, and I knew that the engines had stopped. Through my glasses I could see distinctly the officers on the bridge and several persons leaning over the rail aft. As she was near enough for me to distinguish her name, which was written in big brass letters upon her bows, I read the words *Chung Tong*.

I admit the singularity of it all deeply impressed me, and I knew not at which I wondered more, man's ingenuity or his perfidy. The electric wire had told the people in China that the *Chung Tong* had left Sydney with fifty thousand pounds on board. The next day the newspapers had printed it; a man had read the paragraph; it awoke an idea, and the idea had been duly executed. And now here was the vessel coming up to her destruction.

She stopped less than a quarter of a mile off, and the people on her decks were plainly visible to the naked eye. With glasses I could distinguish the uniform of the officers, while to my dismay I saw some women aft.

But now the boat of which I have spoken was lowered from the liner; four or five men slipped down the falls, and presently the little craft shot out from the big one and came towards us. In the stern sat an officer; in the bows knelt a man with a boathook, while four more rowed.

The sea being smooth, the little boat slipped gallantly across the water, and presently she was brought to a few yards away from us, and just opposite the bridge, upon which the captain stood.

"What ship is this?" asked the young officer, scrutinizing our bows for the name, which had been painted out some three or four days before.

"The *Golden Guinea*," shouted Macshiel, "from Shanghai to the Torres Straits. What are you?"

"The *Chung Tong*—Sydney to Hong Kong. What can we do for you?"

"I'll tell you," said the old man, leaning far out over the rail. "We intend to do a little trading among the islands, but being a bit short of cash, we thought you wouldn't object to lending us a little."

"Eh?" said the young fellow, looking exceedingly astonished.

"I believe you have something like fifty thousand pounds on board. You must hand it over."

The look of stupefaction on the young fellow's face was almost ludicrous. This was evidently the last request he had expected.

"Why, blast your eyes," he said, "you must be mad!"

"So mad," said Macshiel grimly, "that if you don't hand it over I'll sink you."

"Very well," was the reply, "I'll report."

"I'll give your captain five minutes to decide from the time you reach the deck. If the pennant 'Yes' doesn't go up, then I'll open fire. And no hanky panky, mind. This is going to be a big job."

Without more ado the young fellow put about and made straight for his ship, while Gupp uncovered the cannon forward and took his place beside it. Then I felt the excitement of battle in my blood. It would be an ignoble battle, no doubt; but I fancied there would be some desperate work done.

I saw the young officer swarm up the side of the liner and make his way forward to the bridge, where the captain still stood. Then I turned to Macshiel, who, after looking at his watch, rang the engineer to stand by. I knew the men were desperate and resolved; they would have the gold or such revenge as it was possible for them to take. The question was, could the Chung Tong resist us with any hope of success?

Eagerly I watched the little group on her bridge, and presently the captain began to gesticulate wildly. Then I saw him point to the engine room telegraph, and a few seconds after the water began to bubble round her stern. Captain Macshiel immediately flew to our telegraph, and then came the low throb, throb of our own engines.

"Wing him, Gupp!" I heard the skipper shout. "The beggar's going to try to give us the slip."

It so happened that at that moment an awkward angle prevented Mr. Gupp from getting the gun into play, and when at length he did, the Chung Tong was stern on and steaming like mad. I knew by report that she was a good two or three knots faster than we were, and if she could only keep us off for something like half an hour she might defy the Pulo Way.

But the gunner lost no time. Setting about his business in the most approved manner, the boom of the gun told me that the fight had begun. The shot, however, flew high of the mark and splashed into the sea some distance ahead. Gupp laughed uproariously as he loaded again, and I could see the very devil of mischief frolicking over his big face.

There was but a short interval between the first and the second shot. A puff of smoke, a sharp crack forward as of the atmosphere suddenly exploding; then all eyes flew to the liner. Almost at the self same moment the rail about her port quarter was seen flying in all directions. The captain kicked up his heels with delight and yelled out, "Bravo, Gupp! Give it to him again!"

Gupp, whom I no longer doubted had learned his gunnery at the expense of the nation, waved his hand as he sent forth a big laugh. Absorbed in his work, I don't believe he gave a moment's reflection to the horror of his act. He was an enthusiast with only one thought—to make the best play possible with his gun.

The third shot, from the gunner's point of view, was even better than

the second. It struck the high skylight of the poop, and, exploding with a horrid noise, sent the splinters flying in all directions. The fourth missed; but the fifth shattered a boat that swung on the port davits, and destroyed the mizzen shrouds.

This last shot must have proved conclusively to the captain of the liner that in the gunner of the Pulo Way he had a dangerous man to deal with, so without more ado he hoisted the signal of surrender and stopped his engines. We passed very close to him—so close that Captain Macshiel leaned over the rail of the bridge and bellowed, "Get the stuff ready. I'll send a boat alongside in a minute."

We came to about three hundred yards away, always maneuvering so as to keep our bow on. Then some of the men rushed aft to lower the star-board boat, which piece of work Hayling superintended. I tried to catch his eye, for very obvious reasons, but never once did he turn my way.

Presently the mate came along, and as his eyes met mine I saw that his face was all aglow with a quiet, devilish sort of delight.

"Now, then, bustle along, you there!" he cried. "Get ready to go in the boat, and make yourself useful."

"You seem to forget that I am a passenger."

"We have no passengers aboard the Pulo Way," he answered significantly. "You are for us or against us—which is it?"

"I prefer to remain neutral."

"There can be no neutrality," he blustered. "Into that you go, or——"

"Or what?"

He grinned consumedly. It was a joke in ten thousand.

"Don't you be so bally obstinate," he said. "For some reason best known to himself, the old man seems bent upon making a pet of you. But we mean business this time, and you may take my word for it, the old man is not the most patient soul afloat."

It was a close corner, and one out of which I failed to see my way. I looked at the liner yonder, the men about me—the one was as helpless as I, the other ready for anything. Just then I caught a look in Hayling's eye which somewhat reassured me.

"Very well," I said, "I will go, but under protest."

"Oh, that's all right," he replied, with a disagreeable laugh. "I'll duly enter it in the log."

By this time the boat was lowered and swinging clear of the ship, and at a sign from the mate I sprang upon the rail, seized one of the ropes, and slid down into her. Hayling made room for me beside him in the stern. Half a dozen men scrambled down, and we pushed off.

Before us lay the liner, a great black mass of iron, her side crowded with an eager throng. Hayling kept a stiff upper lip, and stared coldly ahead of him; but it seemed to me as though each eye looked unutterable scorn, while each tongue framed the horrid word, "Thief! thief!"

Carlton Dawe.

BY RIGHT OF SWORD.*

A tale of Moscow, the Nihilists, and the Czar—The extraordinary experiences of an Englishman who assumes the name and obligations of a Russian army officer—Complications that bring the bold adventurer within shivering distance of Siberia, and the tactics which earn for him a notable nickname.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

HAMILTON TREGETHNER is an Englishman who has lived a great part of his life in Russia. Deceived by the woman he loves, he is about to go to St. Petersburg to offer himself for the field in the event of war with Turkey, hoping somebody will put a bullet through him, when at the Moscow railway station he is approached by a stranger, Olga Petrovitch, who takes him for her brother Alexis, to whom he bears a marvelous resemblance. This Alexis is a good for nothing roysterer, a lieutenant in the Russian army. He has become involved in a quarrel with Major Devinsky, who persecutes Olga with unwelcome attentions, and fearing to meet the major on the dueling field, is about to flee in disguise. Tregethner becomes interested in the case, and being reckless of what he does in any event, gives Alexis his passport as Hamilton Tregethner and decides to remain in Moscow as Alexis Petrovitch. He fights the duel with Devinsky, utterly routing him, but presently finds himself in a tangle because of a love affair his predecessor had with Paula Tueski, the wife of the chief of police. She is deceived, as are all other friends of the lieutenant, to say nothing of the Nihilists, with whom it turns out he has had dealings. The latter commission him to assassinate Paula Tueski's husband, but Paula kills him herself with Alexis' dagger, the hilt of which she holds in readiness to exhibit in case Alexis offends her.

Meantime Tregethner meets at a ball a beautiful and powerful princess, sister to Prince Bilbassoff, high in government service. The princess takes a great fancy to him, which she is at no pains to conceal, and the prince promises the lieutenant his sister's hand and great honors if he will consent to put out of the way a certain high dignitary, who, it is claimed, has insulted the princess. Realizing by now that he loves Olga, and that Olga loves him, Tregethner is in sore straits to know a way out, and in the height of his perplexities is confronted by new trouble on presenting himself one day for his customary call on his "sister."

CHAPTER XIX—OLGA'S ABDUCTION.

THE Countess Palitzin asked at once if I knew where Olga was. I looked at her in astonishment; and then she told me a message had come from me early in the forenoon asking Olga to go round at once to my rooms. She had gone, promising to return soon or send word. She had done neither, and a six hours' absence had made the old lady anxious.

"She should have been back before this," I said quietly, not wishing to add to her alarm. "Who do you say came for her?"

"Your servant, Borlas, Olga told me."

I tried to reassure her that all was right, though I did not at all like the look of things, and I hurried back to my rooms to question Borlas. He had not been there on my return from barracks, and he was not there now.

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Did this mean treachery? Or had Olga been arrested? Could she be in the hands of the Nihilists? Or what? A thousand wild thoughts flashed through my mind as I stood for a minute thinking what I ought to do first, and trying to decide where to look for her.

Then I recalled my meeting with Devinsky near my rooms.

I dashed out and ran to Essaieff's rooms to find out all he knew about Borlas, as he had recommended the man to me; and to learn whether he would be likely to be bribed to do such an act of treachery as now seemed possible. But my friend was out. Leaving word for him to come at once to me I went to Madame Tueski and questioned her. She equivocated, suggesting that I was feeling her power; and with the utmost difficulty I drew from her that, for all her hints, she knew nothing.

I ran then to the Prince Bilbassoff, but he was away. I hurried next to the princess; she knew nothing, but was full of sympathy and offers of help.

I wanted news, however, not offers of help; and I rushed back to my rooms, on my way to the police, on the off chance that Borlas had returned.

He had not, but in his place there was something much more important. A rough, wild looking countryman was standing at my door, holding the bridle of a shaggy pony that bore signs of heavy traveling, and the man had been trying vainly to get into my house. He addressed me, asking where he could find Lieutenant Petrovitch, and then gave me a slip of paper from Olga, which read:

Am suspicious and sending this back. If anything wrong follow me. O.

I then questioned the man closely, and he said that his wife was called to the window of a carriage to a young lady who was ill. When she had recovered, she gave his wife a handkerchief. In it was the message and a sum of money, with a request that the paper should be brought to me at once. This had occurred at Praxoff, about ten miles out on the north road.

In less than a quarter of an hour I was armed and mounted; and a few minutes saw me free of the city and flying at full gallop in pursuit. I knew the road well enough, owing to my long residence as a boy in Moscow, and I now put my horse to its utmost speed and made straight for the house where Olga had seen the peasant woman.

I found it without the least difficulty and got a description of the carriage, horses, and postilion; and I questioned the woman as to every word Olga had said to her, and who was in the carriage. From what she said, I judged it was Borlas, and that the two were alone.

I stayed no longer than was necessary to hear all the woman had to say, and then I rode on, still at full speed, asking right and left as I went for tidings of the carriage. The trail was broad enough for any one to follow for some miles, and then I came upon information that gave me a complete clue to the whole matter.

Reining up at a wayside inn, I put the usual questions, adding that the lady was my sister and that I was an officer in the Moscow Infantry Regiment. The landlord came to me instantly.

"You are Lieutenant Petrovitch?" he asked.

"Yes," and I told him my errand.

"Have you been engaged in a duel this morning?"

I stared at the man and asked him what he meant. His answer showed what story had been concocted to trick Olga.

"A gentleman engaged two rooms here this morning, saying they would be wanted in connection with a duel in the neighborhood. One of the combatants was Lieutenant Petrovitch, and the latter's sister was coming to be near at hand in case of her brother being hurt. She was coming out with the brother's servant, and when she arrived was to be shown at once to the room engaged for her. As a fact the duel had already been fought in the early hours; Lieutenant Petrovitch had been badly wounded and lay at a private house a few miles further on, too ill to be moved. The sister was to be told this, the news being broken gradually, and she was not to be allowed to leave the inn, unless she insisted very much, in which case the servant would know where to take her; and fresh horses were to be supplied. "I told her gently," continued the landlord, "and she insisted on going on at once without even stopping for food. Fresh horses were put in accordingly, and the carriage went on, with less than half an hour's halt here, all told."

I saw the ruse in a moment. It was to get fresh horses without Olga being suspicious, and to draw in the landlord to appear to give the story corroboration.

"What was the man like who came to you?" I asked impatiently, ordering a horse to be saddled instantly. In reply the landlord described Devinsky accurately.

I saw it all now; and when the man had given me a valuable clue to the road which the carriage had taken—it had been met by some returning post-boys—I set off again in pursuit in the now gathering dusk, as fast as I could make the new horse move.

I rode on till darkness fell; and still on till the moon rose and flooded the land with her thin light; and it was not until ten at night that I reached the end of my journey. Some peasants gave me the final clue. They had met the carriage and a question had been asked of them as to the whereabouts of a certain house. They told me now where this was, and a few minutes later I reached the place.

It was an old, ramshackle structure, once the seat of a family of good position, but now fallen upon evil days. It made three sides of a square and the courtyard in the middle was all weed grown, moss covered and uneven, with one large yew tree standing dark and gloomy in the center. The main entrance was in the middle portion, and there were two small gothic arched doors in the wings. But these seemed very stout as I examined them; and all the windows were latticed with ironwork.

Just the spot for such a venture as this, I thought, as I stole about the place to reconnoiter, treading softly, and keeping as much as possible in the dark shadows which the walls made.

There was not a sound to be heard, nor a light to be seen, while the look of the place made it certain that I should have a hard task to force my way

inside. The same unpromising look of things met me when I left the front and crept round to the back, and when I had been all round the house I could not make up my mind what was the best thing to do.

There are times, however, when any kind of action is better than doing nothing. There was everything to be gained, and nothing to be lost, by Devinsky learning that I had followed him and knew his hiding place. I therefore resolved on a pretty bold course, and drawing my revolver, I stepped out into the full moonlight and walked quickly to the main entrance.

I had arrived at within ten yards of the door when a voice called to me.

"Who goes there? What do you want? Stop, or I fire."

Looking up I saw the gleam of a rifle barrel leveled dead at me. I did not stop to answer, but leaping aside, I darted forward into the doorway, where the man could not cover me with his weapon, because of a shallow porch which intervened to protect me.

The incident showed me the sort of welcome I was to expect.

There was an old and heavy knocker on the door, and a huge bell pull. I seized both of these, and set up first a knocking that might have roused the dead and then a clanging of the bell equally furious and dinning. Presently the bell ceased to sound, and I gathered either that some one within had cut the wires or that I had broken them in my energy. The great knocker suited me equally well, however; perhaps better. Suddenly, and without my knowing the cause, the big door gave way before one of my lusty attacks with the knocker, and as I pushed it swung slowly open.

Everything within was as dark as pitch; and the contrast between the row I had been making and the dead silence that followed was so profound as to make me stand a minute so that my ears should get accustomed to the change.

Then drawing my sword and holding my revolver in my left hand, I stepped in and tried to peer about me.

The light of the moon gave a faint reflection within, but not enough for me to be able to make out anything distinctly; nor, when I strained my ears, could I detect the slightest sound anywhere.

My first thought was that, as I stood in the doorway, I should be an excellent mark for any one caring to shoot, and I slipped aside, therefore, into the heavy shadow of the big door. It was full five minutes before my eyes, keen as they are, could distinguish anything; and then I seemed to make out two doorways, one on each side of a large hall into which the big door opened; and beyond them, in the middle, a broad stairway.

I groped my way warily a few steps, feeling cautiously along the wall, when I stopped and began to reflect that I was making a fool of myself in attempting, single handed and in pitch darkness, to find my way about the place. I must wait for a light of some sort. I had no idea how many men there might be in the house. I did not know a square foot of the place. While I was blundering about in the dark I should be an easy prey for men whom I could as easily fight in the daylight. Moreover, I argued that the knowledge that I had tracked him would keep Devinsky from attempting any devilment as yet.

I was in the house, and I resolved, therefore, to wait patiently where I was in the hall until I had light enough to guide me in my search for Olga.

But I could not keep to the resolution. Scarcely had I formed the plan when the stillness was broken by a woman's scream, shrill and piercing, and a cry for help that made my heart leap into my throat with wrath as I thought I recognized Olga's voice.

Without another moment's hesitation, and uttering a loud shout in reply, I dashed forward to where I could see the outline of the stairway and rushed up in the direction whence the cries proceeded.

Idiot that I was. Of course I dashed straight into the trap that had been laid for me. As I reached the top and turned to dart along a corridor, my feet were tripped and I fell sprawling headlong with a clatter to the ground, my sword flying one way and my revolver another; and before I could help myself three or four fellows were upon me, and though I fought and struggled with them and nearly choked one to whose throat I fastened my grip, I was overpowered and bound securely hand and foot. Then I was blindfolded and gagged, and in this absolutely helpless state, carried down the stairs again, getting on the way two or three hearty kicks from the men I had pummeled. They threw me down on to the floor of an empty room and left me.

I cursed my folly bitterly when I heard the fellows' retreating footsteps after they had locked the door behind them. I had spoiled all for the lack of a little caution. I was an idiot, a fool, a numskull, a jackass, to have been caught by a trick which a child might have anticipated; and I rolled about the floor, pulling at my bonds in my passion, till I had torn the flesh in a dozen places. But I could not loosen a single strand of the cords that bound me; and I gnashed my teeth and could almost have shed tears in my baffled rage and fury.

I lay thus some hours till the light must have come, for even through the heavy bandages on my eyes the darkness seemed tinged with gray. As I thought of the use I might have made of the light, my self reproaches welled up again till I felt almost like a madman.

Later on I heard the door unlocked, and two or three men entered. They came and turned me over, and holding me firmly, cut the ropes that bound my arms and then tied my hands behind me in iron handcuffs, drawing them so tightly that I could not move them without pain. When I was so far secured they cut the ropes from my legs and bade me stand up. I tried to do this, but the rush of the released blood brought with it too much pain, and I was just as helpless as a baby for some minutes. When at length I managed to scramble to my feet, they unfastened the bandage from my eyes and as soon as my dazed sight could focus itself, I saw that brute Devinsky looking at me with a sneering laugh.

"So it's you, is it?" he cried, as if in surprise. "Turned robber, eh, breaking into men's houses in the dead of night? And what the devil are you doing here? My men told me they had caught a thief, but I didn't expect you."

"Don't lie to me," I cried sternly. "You know well enough why I'm here. Where's my sister?"

"Don't get excited," he replied calmly. "It will do you no good. You can do nothing."

"If you're not too dastardly a coward, I answered, get me my sword and let's settle this thing at once."

He winced at the taunt, but he didn't mean to fight that way.

"Thank you. I don't fight with burglars. I hand them over to the police—when it suits me. I always thought there was something secret about you; now I know what it is. You've been living by this sort of work, I suppose. Officer by day and footpad by night. I'm glad my men have caught you at last." Then he sent them away; and as soon as we were alone he asked me, "Do you value your life?"

"Yes, for one reason: to take yours."

"Well, you can have it—if you care to be reasonable."

"I make no terms with a villain like you."

"More fool you," he laughed. "You may as well face the position. You are in my power. This house is big enough and strong enough to hide a regiment, let alone one man. You can't stop me now from carrying off your sister, so you may as well make the best of a bad business, and own that I've got the whip hand of you, partly by my luck and partly by your own infernal stupidity. I'd rather have you on my side in this matter than against me; but, with me or against me, you can't stop me. What do you say?"

"This: that the first use I'll make of my hands when they're free shall be to try and choke the life out of you. And, by heaven, I'll try to do it now." In my rage I rushed upon him, but, like the cowardly cur he was, he struck me, bound and defenseless as I was, with all his force in the face, and then with a cry brought in the other men. These threw themselves upon me and bore me to the ground, and then bound my legs again, so that I was once more absolutely helpless.

"You saw that attack the villain made on me," said Devinsky to the men. "I was offering to release him. You'll bear witness to that. As for you"—turning to me—"you can stay here for a few hours more to cool your murderous fever, and I will send back orders for your release when I am at a safe distance. And remember there are strong cellars below; and if there are any more attempts at violence I'll have you put there."

He went out then with the men, and a moment later returned alone and said, in a voice full of rage and hate, "I'm going through with this, Petrovitch, at any cost, if I have to shut you up here till the flesh drops from your bones. Your sister and I are going further on shortly, and I'll see you once more before I start, and give you one more chance of listening to reason." And with this he left me.

My plight was worse than ever. So far Olga was safe. That was the only glimpse of comfort in all the miserable situation. It was clear, too, that she was in the house; and though she was still in the man's power, I might yet find some means of helping her.

But how? That was the question. And when I thought of his words, that he was going to carry her still further away, I turned sick with rage and despair.

CHAPTER XX.—THE RESCUE.

I FELT as though the heat of purgatory was burning in my veins as I lay on the floor, with the remembrance of Devinsky's blow and his words turning my blood to fire. If ever I were free again, I swore to myself over and over again, I would have his life for that blow. My anguish and rage that he should have Olga in his power were infinite tortures, and all the less endurable because of my abject helplessness.

The one chance I had of deliverance was that some one, perhaps Essaieff, should hear of the matter and follow me. But the hope was so feeble as to be little more than tantalizing, because, fool-like, I had rushed off without leaving any intimation of what had happened. If he did follow me, it would be only after a long interval, and not until Devinsky would have had time to get far away.

Then I began speculating as to what he meant to do. He would scarcely dare to try to make Olga his wife against her will, though he was evidently villain enough to go to great lengths. In this way my thoughts ran over the ground trying to ferret out a means of escape, as well as seeking a key to the man's motives; and thus another hour or two slipped away without my hearing a sound or getting a sign of any one.

The strain of suspense was enough to turn one's brain. But a wholly unexpected and most welcome interruption came to break in upon my reverie. Outside I heard the tramp of horses ridden at a sharp trot into the courtyard of the house, with a jingling of arms and accouterments that told me the riders were either soldiers or mounted police. A sharp word of command brought them to the halt, and as soon as that happened I let out such a lusty yell for help as made the walls ring again and again.

Then my door was opened and two men rushed in. They ordered me to be silent, under pain of instant death, and put revolvers to my head. But I knew they dared not fire with such visitors at the door, and I continued to yell with all my lung power until, throwing down their weapons, they first clapped their hands on my mouth and then thrust a gag into my jaws.

Some five minutes passed, and the tension of my impatience was unendurable. Meanwhile the two men held me, while they cut the bonds from my legs and got ready to slip the gyves from my wrists.

Presently the tramp of feet approached the door of my room, and when it was opened an officer of the mounted police entered with a file of men at his heels. Devinsky was showing the way and speaking as they all came in.

"As I have told you, he made an attack on the house in the night; my men secured him; when I saw him I recognized him, of course, and should have released him, but he tried to murder me—angry, I presume, at having been caught at such work. I then had him bound again, and was going to send today into the city for the police, when you came."

The man in command of the police listened to this in silence, and with a face that showed no more expression than a stone gargoye.

"Release him," he said to his men, and in another moment I was at liberty. As soon as I was free, I began to edge my way, inch by inch, toward where Devinsky stood. I would have him down, police or no police, thought I, even if it were my last act before entering a jail. I guessed, of course, that some Nihilist blabber had told the facts and that I was bound for Siberia, or worse.

"Lieutenant Petrovitch, you are to accompany me, if you please," said the leader, and a sign to his men set two of them at each side of me.

"I have first one word to say to that—gentleman," I said, pointing to Devinsky.

"Excuse me. My instructions are peremptory. I must ask you to go with me at once—without a moment's delay."

I saw Devinsky's face brighten at the thought of thus getting rid of me, and my fingers itched and tingled to be at his throat.

"Am I arrested?" I asked. "For what?"

"I can say nothing, lieutenant," replied the man.

"Do you know why I'm here?"

"If you please, we must go and at once," was the stolid reply.

I saw Devinsky grin again at this.

"This man has carried off my sister," I cried. "She is in his power now, and it was when I came to find her that he tricked me and then had me bound as you see. Send your men to find her. She must return with us."

"I have no instructions to that effect," replied the man curtly.

"Confound your instructions," I burst out hotly. "Are you a man—to leave a young girl in this plight?" My reply stirred only anger.

"I cannot do what I am not ordered to do," said the officer again curtly.

"Then I won't go without her. Go back and—or, better, send one of your men for permission to do this, and stay here and keep guard over me and my sister at the same time."

"It is impossible. My instructions are peremptory."

I began to lose all self command, and only by the most strenuous efforts did I prevent myself from heaping reproaches upon him for his cold blooded officialism.

"Will you leave a couple of men here, then, to protect her?"

"I can say no more, lieutenant, and do no more than I have said. And now, we must go."

It maddened me beyond telling to think that I was to be carried away in this ruthless, heartless, implacable fashion at the very moment when the rescue of the girl I loved more than my life was but a matter of walking into another room and bringing her out. I was staggered by the blow.

"Do you know that I would ten thousand times rather that you had left me bound and helpless as I was, than take me away in this fashion? I must see my sister. I must save her—why, man, are you lost to every sense of feeling? Take her away first, make her safe, and then I swear to heaven you or this man can do with me as you please."

The stolid, stony impassiveness of the man's face crushed every hope out of me. I could have struck him in my baffled rage.

"I have twenty men in the troop here, lieutenant. My instructions are to take you at once to Moscow. I prefer to use no force, but I have it, if necessary."

I wrung my hands in despair; and then with a wild dash I rushed to the door to try to find Olga for myself. It was useless. They closed on me in an instant, and I was helpless. Then they marched me out to the horses, venting by the way bitter reproaches and unavailing protests, mingled with loud laments and revilings.

"Will you give me your parole to go quietly, lieutenant?" asked the leader.

"On one condition: that we ride at full speed all the way."

"I can make no condition," replied this block of official stolidity; "but my instructions are to act with all haste. One question—have you been ill treated here?"

"Only as I told you."

Then he went back into the house, saying he would speak to Devinsky about it. I saw the latter change color when he received the police report, and he made a gesture of seeming repudiation, lifting his hands and shrugging his shoulders. After that he threw me a malicious look from his angry, evil face that almost made me clamber down from the saddle to try to have a reckoning with him there and then.

"When I'm out of this I'll hunt you out," I cried, between my teeth.

"When!" he answered, and the sneer in which he showed his teeth as he uttered the word was in my eyes for half that long, wild ride.

The police leader kept his word, and we rode at a hard gallop nearly all the way, the whole country side turning out as we thundered by.

The man would not say a word to me on the journey, except that he had been ordered to hold no communication at all with me, and thus I did not know where they were taking me to, or whether I was arrested or rescued, until we drew rein at police headquarters in Moscow, and I was ushered straight into the presence of Prince Bilbassoff, all dirty, disheveled, bruised, and travel stained as I was.

He arose and met me, holding out his hand.

"My dear lieutenant, you are really giving me an unconscionable amount of trouble. As much, indeed, as if you were already a member of my family."

"What does all this mean?" I asked. "Am I arrested?"

"What an impatient fellow you are! It will all come in time," he returned, with an indescribable blend of good feeling and suggestive threat. "Is this all the thanks one gets for rescuing you from what, judging by your appearance, has been a very ugly mess? This *harum scarum* business will really have to stop—when you marry." He seemed almost to laugh behind his grizzled mustache in the pause that emphasized the last three words.

"Will you tell me the real meaning of this? I have already asked you."

"Sit down;" and he sat down himself and lounged back easily in his chair. "By the way, have you lunched?"

"For God's sake, man, don't trifle in this way. If you know the facts, as I suppose you do, you'll know I'm in no mood for bantering courtesy. Why am I torn away by your men by force at the very moment when my sister is in danger at the hands of the brute who has carried her off? I suppose you know all this? What does it mean, I repeat?"

"You can understand, perhaps, lieutenant, that as it is two days since my sister referred you to me, and you had left Moscow hastily, she was growing a little anxious. You know something of women in love and their insistent moods."

"To Hades with all these plots and intrigues," I cried furiously. "If you mean that that fiend Devinsky is to have my sister in his power, and I am to sit down coolly and bear it while you talk to me about marriage, you don't know me. I'll think of nothing, talk of nothing, do nothing, till I either have saved her and killed that villain, or am killed myself."

"Do you mean that you will set me at defiance?" cried the prince, in stern, ringing tones, his eyes flashing at me. "That you dare to flout the offers we have made you, and have the hardihood to set the needs of the country below your own little petty personal feelings and wishes? Do you know what that means, sir?"

"I care not," I answered recklessly. "I tell you this to your face. If my sister be not saved at once, I'll never set eyes on you or your sister again, unless it be that you make me grin at you from behind the bars of some one of your cursed prisons. That is my last word, if it costs me my life."

He rose and looked at me so sternly that I could almost have flinched before him if my stake in the matter had not been so great. I never met such a look of concentrated power before.

"If you dare to repeat that, Lieutenant Petrovitch, I will send you straight to the Mallovitch," he said, with positively deadly intensity of tone, pointing his finger through the window to where the frowning tower of the great prison was visible.

"I care not if you send me to purgatory," I cried. "Save my sister, or my hand shall rot at the wrist before I lift it in your service."

We stood staring intently, dead into each other's eyes; and he stretched forward a hand to summon those who would carry out his threat.

Then he breathed deeply, smiled, and offered me his hand instead.

"By heaven, you're the man we want in all truth. Now, I'll tell you what you ask."

He had only been testing me after all, and my wits were so blunt in my agitation that I had not seen through him.

"Have no fear for your sister," he continued. "She is quite safe. My man gave that to Devinsky when he was leaving that puts all doubt on that score aside. She is part of our bargain, and the arm of the state is over her. If you accept my offer at once, your sister herself shall decide that man's punishment. My object in all this is twofold—to let you feel something of the substance of power that will be yours when you have consented; and secondly, to test a little more thoroughly your stanchness. I am satisfied now, lieutenant. And I hope you are."

"Where is my sister now?" I asked, after a moment's consideration.

"Where you left her, of course. Decide how you wish her to come to Moscow. Shall my men fetch her? Shall that man bring her back himself? Or will you ride out? It is a matter of the merest form—but as yet, of course, you are unaccustomed to your influence and power."

He was the devil at tempting, and though he had told me his motive, and I knew the rank impossibility of doing what he wanted, I could not help a little thrill of pleasure at the consciousness that this power lay within my grasp.

"I will ride out and bring her in myself," I said, with a flush of pleasant anticipation at the thought.

"As you will. This will do everything," he said, as he wrote me an order in the name of the emperor. I knew its power well enough. "One condition, by the by. You must not fight this Devinsky; nor do anything to provoke a fight."

"I won't promise," I answered.

"Then I give no order. Your life is ours, not yours to play with. That is the essence of the matter."

"I will promise," I said, changing suddenly as I thought of Olga and the delight of seeing her again. "My word on it. I do nothing except in self defense, or in defense of my sister."

"We'll be off with you, then," he said, rising and shaking hands, and speaking as lightly as if I were a schoolboy being sent off for a ride; and as though there were not between us jot or tittle of a plan in which life and death, fortune and marriage, were the stakes.

I hurried away to make preparations for riding back at once; and half an hour later I had had my first meal for twenty four hours and was again in the saddle, pricking at top speed along the northern road, followed by one of the prince's confidential servants, sent, as the former said, with especial instructions to look after the welfare of one who was soon to be a member of the family.

There is no need to describe with what different emotions and thoughts I made the present journey. It is enough to say that I dashed along at top speed, haunted by half a fear that something might yet go wrong with the plans, and that Olga might still be in some danger; while a desire more keen than words can express came upon me to have her once more under my own care.

At the same time the sense of power to which the appeal had been so astutely made was roused, and I was conscious of an unusual glow of pride.

When I reached the house where I had had the ugly experience of the previous night, I looked out for any sign of hostility. But there was none. A man came immediately in answer to my summons, and Devinsky was waiting for me in the large hall, which I scanned curiously after my night's experience in it.

The sight of Devinsky roused me, but I put the curb on my temper. I handed him the order in silence. He read it and sneered.

"It is a good and safe thing to shelter behind government powers," he

said. "Your sister is up stairs. This way." He led and I followed, my heart beating fast.

We passed up the stairs and then turned along a corridor to the right, and after turning again to the right, and entering, as I thought, the right wing of the rambling old house, we went up another short and very narrow flight of stairs. Then he opened the door of a room in silence—indeed we had not spoken a word all the time—and stood aside for me to pass.

Olga was sitting at the far end of the room, looking out of the window, which was at the side away from the courtyard, with a woman attendant near her; and she did not even turn round when the door opened.

But when I uttered her name and she saw me, she sprang up, speaking mine in reply with such a glad cry, and ran to me with a look of such rare delight on her face, that I think she was going to throw herself into my arms and I was certainly going to let her, oblivious of all but the rush of love that moved our hearts simultaneously.

When she was close to me, she checked herself, however, and put her hands in mine, as a sister might. But the glances from her eyes told me all I cared to know at that moment, while her gaze roamed over me as if in bewilderment.

"How is it you are better—and out? Where is your wound? What is that mark on your face? I don't understand. They told me you were lying dangerously wounded and that you wished me to remain here until you could bear to see me."

"There is a good deal you don't understand yet, Olga," I said. "The story of the duel was a lie from start to finish."

"Then you're not wounded? Oh, I'm so glad, Alexis;" and moving her hands up my arm, and after a timid glance at the woman, she looked her thankfulness and solicitude into my eyes.

The look made me speechless. Had I tried to answer it in words, I must have told her my love.

"You are to come with me, Olga," I said presently, recovering myself. "The aunt is all impatience to have you back again."

"Why? I explained all to her in my messages."

"Your messages got lost on the way," I answered, and she saw by my tone how things were. She got ready to come with me without another word; and I could feel my heart thumping and lurching against my ribs as I watched her and caught her turn now and again to look at me and send me a little smile of trust and pleasure.

There was no need for us to speak much, as we were beginning to understand each other without words.

We went out of the room together, and I was surprised and glad to see on a chair, close by the door, the sword which I had dropped the previous night. I took it up, and as I did so Olga cried out in great and sudden fear.

I looked up and saw Devinsky at the narrow head of the short stairway.

"I've complied with the order," he said, his voice vibrating with anger; "and I've given your sister freely into your hands. You are at liberty to

pass—alone." He spoke to her and then turned to me: "But not you, till you and I have settled our old score."

"As you will," replied I readily. "Nothing will please me more. But stay," I cried, remembering my promise. "I cannot now. I have passed my word. Stand aside, please, and let us pass."

"Not if you were the Czar himself," he answered hotly. "And I'm not going to let you shield yourself either behind the government—you spy—or behind your sister's petticoats. If she doesn't choose to go when she has the chance, let her stop and see the consequences."

"Olga, you had better go on," I whispered. "This may be an ugly business, and not fit for you to be here."

"Where you are, I stop, come what may," she answered firmly.

"I've not come here to fight now," I said to Devinsky. "I'll meet you willingly enough another time, God knows. But now, I've passed my word;" and with that I raised my voice and shouted with all my strength to Prince Bilbasoff's servant, who was below, to come to my assistance.

For answer Devinsky called on a couple of men who until then had been hidden, and with drawn swords and a loud shout the three rushed forward to throw themselves upon me.

CHAPTER XXI.—THREE TO ONE.

A GLANCE round told me the attack had indeed been shrewdly planned. The place in which we all were was a large square anteroom or landing place, lighted from above. Four or five doors opened from it into the rooms on either side, and the narrow stairway was the only means of communication with the rest of the house. I was caught like a rat in a trap, and unless I could beat off the men who were thus attacking me at such dangerous odds, I was as good as a dead man.

I whipped out my sword and thrust Olga back into the room we had left, just in time to parry the first wild lunges Devinsky made at me; and at the first touch of the steel all my coolness came to me.

Everything must turn on the first minute or two; and knowing my man I set all my skill to work to keep him so engaged as to hamper the attempts of the other two to get to close quarters with me.

I worked back into a corner of the place, close to the door of the room, and then as I darted out lunge after lunge with the swiftest dexterity, my three opponents were compelled to get into one another's way in their hurried maneuvers to avoid my strokes. By this means I hampered their fighting strength and lessened it by at least one man, since all could not possibly get to strike at me at the same time. But even thus the odds were too heavy.

Devinsky was nothing like my equal with the sword, and his rage and mad hate now rendered him less deadly than usual; but with two others to help him I could hardly hope to win in the end. For this reason as I fought I uttered shout after shout to the man below to come to my assistance. These cries had also the effect of disconcerting my opponents. Then a lucky chance happened.

One of the men, in jumping back out of the way of one of my thrusts, stumbled over the second and sent this one for an instant into Devinsky's way. I saw my chance, and seized it in an instant. In a trice I rushed at the half prostrate man, and disdaining to kill him when his guard was down, I kicked him with my heavy riding boot with all my force in the face, and sent him reeling back, groaning and half choked with the blood that came gushing out of his nose and mouth, while his sword went rattling across the floor to where Olga stood, looking on aghast, breathless and open mouthed in her fear.

But the chance nearly cost me dear, for the man's companion turned on me and thrust at me with such directness and rapidity as all but ended the fight, for his sword went through the fleshy part of my arm, just above the elbow. An inch or so nearer the body would have sent it right through my heart. It was the last thrust he ever made, however. The next instant my blade had found his heart, and with a groan he dropped.

Before I could withdraw it, however, Devinsky uttered a cry of hate, and dashing at me thrust at my heart with all his strength.

He must have killed me but for Olga. That splendid girl had picked up the fallen man's sword, and now seeing my plight, she sprang forward, at the hazard of her life, crying out "Coward," and struck down Devinsky's sword with all her force.

"Good!" I cried, and the next minute I had wrenched my weapon free and held the man.

"Take care. Back to the room, or behind me, child," I cried, when I heard my opponent curse in his foiled attempt to kill me and saw him turn as if to attack Olga. "Now, you butcher, it's you and I alone; and you or I to live."

"As you will," he said, and I saw him clench his teeth and set his face in the way men do who know that they are face to face with a risk where failure means death.

My blood was up now, and I meant death, too. He had given up all right to expect anything else, and I had no mind to let him off. If ever a man had earned death he had. He had heaped on me every indignity that one man could put on another, and to crown it all he had just tried to murder me. I would kill him with less compunction than one kills a dog; and I set about the task with the coolest deliberation and purpose.

The scene was a grim and ghastly one enough. The floor was all slippery in places with the blood of the man I had killed, whose body lay huddled up against the wall, as well as of the other who sat on the ground still spitting and coughing and mumbling and cursing from the fearful effects of my kick. In the middle we two stood fighting to the death, watching each other with the fire of hate and blood and lust in our eyes, while Olga, all eagerness, excitement and tension, stood in the doorway watching us with white, drawn face and dilated eyes, the deeply drawn breath coming in spasms through her distended nostrils and slightly parted lips.

I forced the fight with all my power, and my blade flashed about my antagonist until all his skill was useless even to defend himself against my

point, while any offensive tactics were out of the question. I wounded him three times, once so close to the heart that Olga cried out, and at length recalling the knack with which I had disarmed him in our former encounter, I used it now; and after a few more cunning and swift passes I whipped his sword from his grasp and sent it whirling to the other end of the place.

My eye flashed as I drew back my arm for the death thrust.

"Ah, don't, Alexis," cried Olga, in a sort of whisper of horror. "Don't kill him."

It stopped me instantly, and my arm fell.

"As you will," I answered readily; "but he doesn't deserve it. You owe your life to the woman you've tried to wrong, not to me," I said to him shortly. "Stand out of the way and let us pass."

He moved aside doggedly, eying us with surly, sullen hate, as Olga, trembling violently now that the excitement was over, went on first and I followed her through the stairway and down and out of the house.

When we reached the courtyard the postchaise which I had ordered to follow us from the inn had arrived, and Olga and I entered it at once.

"Thank God, we're out of the house," was my companion's fervent exclamation, as the carriage turned into the road and we left the gloomy place behind us.

"Would to God we were out of Russia," said I, speaking from my heart. "Then——" I paused and looked into her face.

"All may yet come right," answered Olga, meeting my eyes and putting her hand in mine. My clasp closed on it and we sat thus for some moments, just hand in hand, each silently happy in the knowledge of the other's love.

Then I bent toward her and gradually drew her to me, my eyes all the time lighted with the light from hers.

"Is it love, Olga, lovers' love?" I asked in a passionate whisper.

For answer she smiled and whispered back:

"It always has been, Alexis;" and she met my betrothal kisses with warmth equal to mine. And after that we did not care to say a word, but leaned back in the carriage as it flew through the country in the gathering gloom of the evening, bumping, jolting, rolling, and creaking. What cared we for that? Olga was fast in my arms, her head on my breast and her face close to mine, so close that we were tempted ever and again to let the story of our love tell itself over and over in our kisses; and neither Olga nor I had a thought of resisting the temptation.

This would have gone on for hours, so far as I was concerned; I was in a veritable palace of delight with freshly avowed love as my one thought. But Olga roused herself suddenly with a little start and a little cry.

"Oh, Alexis, what have you made me do? Your wound."

I had forgotten all about it, but now when she mentioned it my left arm felt a little stiff.

"I am ashamed of myself," she cried. "What a love must mine be, that I want to dream of it with selfish pleasure when you are wounded. You make me drink oblivion with your kisses."

"Love is a fine narcotic," replied I, laughing. "I felt no wound while

you looked at me. But now that you bring me down to earth with a rush, I begin to remember it. It is nothing much and will best wait till we are in Moscow."

"Do you think I will let any one see that wound before I do? Why, it was gained for my sake. And you love me? And now"—"now" was a long loving kiss and a lingering look into my face as she held it between her hands while her eyes were radiant with delight. Then she sighed. "Now, I am all sister again."

I was looking my doubts of this and meant to test them, shaking my head in strong disbelief, when the carriage stopped suddenly. Looking out I saw that we were at the inn, and must therefore have been driving long over an hour. It had seemed scarce a minute.

"Will you get out, while we change horses, sir?" asked the prince's servant, who had come with the carriage on horseback.

"My brother is wounded and must have attendance at once," said Olga, in so self possessed a tone that I smiled.

"Only a scratch," said I, as if impatiently. "But my sister is always fidgety."

We went into the house then and Olga insisted on examining the wound, and when she saw the blood I had lost—not much, but making brave show on my white linen—she was all solicitude and anxiety. She sent the maids flying this way and that, one to fetch hot water, another bandages, a third lint, and altogether made such a commotion in the place that one would have thought I had been brought there to die.

She bathed the little spot so tenderly and delicately, too, asking every moment if her touch hurt me; and she washed it and then covered it, bandaged it and bound it up, and did everything with such infinite care, that I was almost glad I had been wounded.

And the whole process she accompanied with a running fire of would be scolding comment upon the trouble that brothers gave, the obstinate creatures they were, the rash and foolish things they did, how much more bother they were than sisters, and a great deal more to the same effect—till I thought the people would see through the acting as clearly as I did, assisted as I was by the thousand little glints and glances she threw to me when the others were not looking our way.

Then she held a long consultation with the landlady, a large woman, who seemed as kindly at heart as she was portly in body, whether it would be safe for me to go on to the city that night, or whether a doctor had not better be brought out to me there, and it took the persuasion and assurances of us all to win her consent to my going on.

I tried to punish her for this when we were in the carriage again, by telling her I supposed she was unwilling to travel in my company. But I wasted my breath and my efforts, as she was all the way in the highest spirits.

"I don't quite know which I like better," she said, laughing; "being sister with a knowledge of—of something else, as I was just now at the inn, or—or——"

"Or what?"

"Or riding with Hamylton Tregethner," she answered, laughing again gleefully. "Do you notice how easily I can say that dreadful name?"

"I notice I like it better from your lips than from any others."

"I've practised it—and it was so difficult. But I might even get to like it in time, you know."

"By the way, I remember you once told me you didn't like Hamylton Tregethner."

"Ah, yes. That was my brother's old friend. A very disagreeable person. He wanted to take my brother away from Moscow. A person must be very unpleasant who wishes to divide brother and sister. Don't you think so?"

"That depends on the rate of exchange," said I.

"Perhaps, but at that time there was no talk of exchange at all."

"And no thought of it."

"Ah!" And for answer she nestled to me again, and merged the sister in the lover with a readiness and pleasure that showed what she thought of that particular exchange.

And with these little intervals of particularly sweet and pleasant light and shade, we traveled the miles to Moscow in what seemed to us an incredibly short time.

CHAPTER XXII.—THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

It was not until a night's rest had rendered me again subject to the pressure of actualities that I fully realized how the avowal of my love had rather increased than diminished the difficulties of our position.

Despite my fatigue and wound I was stirring in good time, and had had the doctor's report and interviewed the colonel to get leave from regimental work in time to get round to see Olga pretty early. I wished to discuss with her the whole position before going to report to Prince Bilbassoff the result of things with Devinsky.

The manner in which Olga met me was one of the sweetest things imaginable, and the presence of the good aunt, the Countess Palitzin, added to its effect. They were sitting together when I entered.

"It is Alexis, aunt," said Olga, rising. She was a mixture of laughing love and sisterly indifference.

"Alexis, you are a good lad, a dear lad," said the old lady, usually very stately and punctilious. "Come here, boy, and kiss me and let me kiss you. You have done splendidly and bravely in this matter of Olga. She has told me all about it."

"All?" I echoed, looking at Olga, who tried to keep the smile that was dancing in her eyes from traveling to her lips.

"All that a sister need tell," she said.

"Olga, I have no patience with you," exclaimed the aunt. "You have a brother in a thousand—in ten thousand—and yet you speak in that way. And I see you never kiss him now." I should like to know why. Are you

ashamed of him? Here he has saved you from all this, and you give him the points of your finger nails to touch. Yet you are not cold and feelingless in other things."

"I am glad that you speak to her like this," I said gravely. "She seems to think that a sister should never kiss such a brother as I am."

"Do you mean to say you think I have given you no reason to believe I am thankful for what you have done?" she retorted, fencing me cleverly.

"I don't echo our aunt's words, that you are cold and feelingless, Olga—she is not that, Aunt Palitzin. But I do find that as a sister she places a strong reserve on her feelings."

"To hear you speak," said Olga, laughing lightly, "one might think I had two characters: in one of which I was all warmth and affection; in the other all coldness and reserve."

"And I believe that would be about right, child," said the countess; "for when the boy is not here your tongue never tires of praising him; and yet the moment he comes, he might be a stranger instead of your own nearest and dearest."

Olga blushed crimson at this.

"Brothers have to be treated judiciously," she said.

"Judiciously," Olga? Why, what on earth do you mean? How could you love a brave fellow like Alexis injudiciously?"

"Love is often best when it is most injudicious," said I sententiously, coming to Olga's rescue; but she betrayed me shamefully. Looking innocently at me she asked:

"Would you like us to be a pair of injudicious lovers then, Alexis?"

"If I never show more lack of judgment than in my love for you, I shall get well through life, Olga," I retorted.

"I am glad you speak so seriously, Alexis," said my aunt. "I'll be no party to any deception. She does love you, boy, however much she may try to hide it when you are here;" and with this, which set us both laughing merrily, the old lady went away.

"Does she?" I asked; and the question brought Olga with a happy look into my arms.

But I had not come to make love, sweet though it was to have the girl's arms about me; and as soon as I could, I began to talk seriously about our position.

In the first place, I told her everything that had happened; and there was one thing that amused her, despite the tremendously critical state of our affair. It was about the great suitor the prince had promised for her.

"What, another?" she said, with a cynical crinkling of her forehead. "Upon my word, what with brothers and lovers, I am surely plagued. This makes the——" She stopped.

"How many?"

"I don't think I know. Either two or three, according as we reckon you. While you're my brother, two, I suppose. Otherwise, three."

"Otherwise' is a good deal shaky, I'm afraid," said I, shaking my head. "And I begin to question whether he'll ever count."

"He may not; but in that case no other ever will," returned Olga earnestly. "Did you say that on purpose to get another assurance from me?"

"No, indeed. I only spoke out of the reality of my doubts;" and then we went on threshing the thing out.

"There is but one possible chance," said I, after I had told her all. "It's a remote one, perhaps, but such as it is, we must use it. You must go."

"I won't leave Moscow unless you do," she broke in. "I wouldn't have done it before when you wanted, but now"—she paused and blushed and her eyes brightened—"wild horses shau't tear me away."

"There are stronger things than wild horses, child; and I shall appeal to one in your case. You must go in order to try to get me out of the muddle here."

"Yes, I'll go for that, if it's necessary," she declared, as readily as a moment before she had declined.

"It is necessary. Shortly, my idea is this. We can't get away together at the same time. We are shut in here in the very center of Russia, and if we left together we could not hope to reach the frontier for many hours after we had been missed from here; while, if we were missed only ten minutes before we got to the barrier, it would be long enough for us to be stopped. Besides, there are ten thousand things that come in the way. But that doesn't apply to your traveling alone; and if I can get a passport or a permit for you, I believe you will be able to get across the frontier before any one has an idea that you have even left the city. In my case that would be impossible. There are three separate sets of lynx eyes on me. The prince's police, the most vigilant of all; the Nihilists', the most dangerous, and Paula Tueski's, the most vengeful. I shall have the most difficult task to evade them, and I believe it will be only possible, if at all, by a sort of double cunning. But there is one way you can help."

"What is that?" asked Olga, whose interest was breathless.

"I have a friend, Balestier; you've heard of him—the Hon. Rupert Balestier. He saw your brother in Paris and believes that some devilment is on foot. If you can find him and tell him all that has happened, and the mess that things are in, I believe—in fact, I know—that he would exhaust every possible means of helping me. It is possible that our foreign office might be moved by the influence he could bring to bear, and I know that in such a task he'd stir up every friend and relative he has in the world. My plan is simply this. You must go with all possible speed to Paris; find him, tell him all, and get him to do what he thinks best and use what efforts he can. In the mean time, if I can't escape I shall either have to feign consent with this wretched duel and marriage business, and wait on events; or, if I get a chance of leaving, slip off in an altogether different direction."

"It is a terrible trouble I have brought you to, Alexis," said the girl sadly.

"I would pay a far bigger price for this trouble," I answered, taking her hand and kissing it. "And when we are once out of this too hospitable land of yours, we shall laugh at it all together."

"Yes, when!" she said, and her tone suggested a hopelessness which responded only too well to that which I felt secretly.

While we were together, however, it was impossible for us to feel downcast for long. There was such infinite pleasure in mere companionship that the grim troubles which surrounded us were shut out of our thoughts. The present was so bright and dear that it seemed impossible the gloom could soon close in on us.

But when I had left her and was alone in my rooms, I was gloomy enough; and my spirits were certainly not raised when my new servant ushered in Paula Tieski.

"You would not come to me, Alexis, so I have to come to you," was her greeting. "You neglect me, I suppose, because of the great friends you have made."

"Great friends?"

"Yes. I hear that you are finding much pleasure in the society of a certain great lady."

"Oh, you mean the Princess Weletsky." I laughed as I spoke.

"It does not make me laugh," she said, frowning.

"You are in mourning, and laughter goes ill with tears," I returned. I hated the woman more every time I saw her.

"If I am in mourning it is you who are the cause," she cried, stamping her foot angrily. "I want to know what this new—new friendship, shall I call it?—means."

"You may call it what you like. The princess is nothing to me," said I, thinking more of my affections than of the facts.

"And never will be?" said my companion abruptly.

"And never will be, I hope," I agreed, with the accents of unmistakable sincerity.

But my visitor was suspicious and did not believe me. She got up and came close to me, and stared hard into my eyes as if searching there for the truth.

"Then why are you so cold to me? Not a kindly word, not a gesture, not a glance that you mightn't have thrown to the veriest beggar in the street have you given me. You, who used always to brighten when I came near you. I have seen your eyes light up a hundred times, Alexis, when you have let them rest on me, praising, pleasing, and loving me. And now you are as cold as a tombstone. Will you swear to me you have no love for this other woman—this princess?"

"Most certainly I will."

"Ah, what is the use of an oath in which there is no fire, no life, nothing but dead, cold ashes! What has changed you? Are you thinking of marrying this woman?"

"If she waits till I wish to marry her, she'll die unmated," I returned.

"Why can't you say yes or no to my questions?" she cried, stamping her foot again, irritated by the little evasion. "Are you thinking of marrying her?"

"No. Is that answer blunt enough for you?"

"It sounds like a forced lie more than anything else. Do you know what I would do, Alexis, if I thought you meant to try to deceive me?"

"I can pretty well guess," I answered calmly. "Probably go found and have afternoon tea with her and tell her that little fable which you told me the other day. You weary me with these constant threats, Paula. They get like a musket that's held so long at one's head that it rusts at the lock and the trigger can't be pulled. It would be so much more interesting if you'd go and do something."

With that I turned away and lighted a cigarette, almost wishing in my heart that I could offend her sufficiently to drive her away, and yet sick at the knowledge of her power over Olga and me.

"I like that tone better," she said, with a laugh. "At least it shows some kind of feeling. I hate a log. You will find I can 'do something,' as you say, when the time comes, if you drive me to it. My muskets don't miss fire."

"No, nor your daggers blunt their points. I admit you can be deadly enough where you hate."

"Don't make me hate you, then," she retorted quickly.

"Is that possible, Paula?" I replied, turning to her with a smile.

The instant change in this most remarkable woman at this one slight touch of tenderness was wonderful. She was hungering for the love I could no more give her than I could have given her the crown of Russia; and at this little accent of kindness she grew all softness and smiling love.

"Ah, God! You can do as you like with me, Alexis," she cried excitedly. "Just now you were rousing all the devil there is in me, and now no more than a smile drives out of my heart every thought save my love for you. If it is so easy to make me happy, why kill me with your coldness? Kiss me, Alexis." She came to throw her arms round me, but wishing to avoid this caress, I remembered my little wound, and stepping back, kept her off.

"Mind, I have a little hurt here;" and I pointed to the place.

Little did I think of the consequences of that simple action, or of the price I should have to pay for shirking a few distasteful kisses. She was at once all anxiety.

"A hurt? A wound? Tell me what it is. Have you—was it in consequence of rescuing your sister? Have you had some fight or other?"

I told her in as few words as I could, glad to turn her thoughts from her wish to caress me. When I had to admit that it was a slight sword thrust, however, she insisted upon seeing the wound as well as the places where I had torn my arm in the efforts to get rid of my bonds.

No one could fail to see her care was prompted by deep feeling.

I took off my coat and just turned up my sleeve to satisfy her curiosity, and held out my arm for her to see, laughing half shamefacedly as I did so, to assure her there was no cause for real anxiety, and that she was making much of nothing.

But the effect it had on her was startling indeed.

After glancing at the marks which were fast dying away, for my skin always heals very rapidly, she smoothed them gently and kissed them.

"It is the left arm, Alexis; always the left arm," she said, glancing up

with a smile, and speaking as if there was some special significance in the fact, though what it could be I could not even guess, of course.

The chief mark was on the lower part of the upper arm, just above the elbow, and when she had kissed it, and had turned it round so that the front part of the forearm, where the muscles are broadest, was in full view, I felt her start violently, and heard her catch her breath quickly, as if with a gasp of surprise.

She stared at it for fully a minute without raising her eyes, her only gesture being to pass her fingers across the muscles twice.

When she raised her eyes and looked at me, there was an astounding change in her face. She was as white as death, and trembled so violently that even her face quivered, while her eyes were fixed on me with an expression of wildness and mingled emotions such as I could not read or even guess at.

"Are you ill?" I asked.

She started again as I spoke, and her lips merely moved very slightly as she moistened them with her tongue.

And all the time she kept the same staring, strained, frowning, questioning look fixed on me.

"What's the matter?" I cried again. "Are you ill?" I thought she was in for a fit of some kind.

But all she did was to stare with the same indescribable intensity, the heavy brows closing together as the frown deepened on her forehead.

"My God!"

The exclamation seemed to be wrung from her in pain of thought.

She took hold of my arm again and examined the same place once more with briefer, but no less fierce scrutiny.

Then looking up again into my face she let the arm fall. She then seemed to shrink from me as she drew in one long, deep, shivering breath that sounded between her teeth. Next she turned away and sat down, pressing both her hands to her face.

Every vestige of feeling and passion had passed, leaving only the close, concentrated, strained tension. The color had left her cheeks, and the roundness and beauty of her face appeared to have been transformed in a moment into a veritable presentment of lean, haggard, vigilaut doubt.

Many minutes passed before either of us spoke. Then she got up and again came quite close to me, and staring right into my eyes, asked in a voice all changed and unmusical—a sort of keen, piercing whisper, that seemed to send a chill through me—while she pointed to my arm:

"What does it mean? Who are you?"

I returned the look steadily, but bit my lip nearly through as I guessed well enough the discovery she had made. I answered lightly:

"Excellently acted. But what is it all about?"

"Who are you? That tells me who you are not." She spoke in the same hard, discordant whisper, and pointed to my arm again.

"Are you mad?" I cried sternly. "What do you mean by this pretense?"

Her only answer was to stare with the same stony intensity right into my eyes.

"Shall I send for my own sister to identify me?" I cried, with what I intended as sarcastic emphasis. But the effect of my question quite disconcerted me.

It broke down her reserve, and with a cry that was almost a scream she threw herself into a chair and gave vent to emotions that were no longer controllable.

For an hour she was in this semi hysterical condition, and I could guess her leading thought. If I was not the man she had believed, she would jump to the thought that Olga and I were lovers, and not brother and sister. Her jealousy made her a madwoman.

By the time she had recovered from her frenzy I had resolved on my course. The only thing possible was to hold strenuously to the old deception. What had shaken her belief in me I could not, of course, even guess. If by any means she could make her words good, it was clear she carried my life in her hands. Strong as the story which she had concocted as to my supposed crime would have been against the real Alexis, it was a hundred times stronger as told against some one impersonating Alexis, for what she would of course declare were Nihilist purposes. The mere fact of the impersonation would be accepted as proof of guilt in everything, while Olga's share in the conspiracy would render her liable to a punishment only less in extent than mine.

As I thought of all this, my rage against the woman passed almost beyond control, but I forced it back and listened when she spoke—telling me of all the things which had made me seem so different. My conduct to her; my manner; my lack of love; the difference in looks, in gestures, and in what I said and the way I said it; the thousand things that had set her wondering at the change in me.

Then she spoke of the change in my sister's conduct: how a word from me had made her friendly where a thousand words before had failed. And when she spoke and thought of Olga, she seemed to lose all self control, declaring she had been made a tool and a dupe for some purposes of our own.

My protestations were of no avail. She brushed them aside with abrupt contempt; and when I tried to find out indirectly what her proof was, she laughed angrily and would not tell me.

"I will tell you when I bid you good by for Siberia, or see you for the last time in the condemned cell. You shall not die in ignorance," she said; and then she went on to dwell with horrible detail upon the punishments that were in store for both Olga and myself.

But she overdid it all, and showed me her weak point, and thus gave me a clue to my best tactics. Her feeling was not hatred of me, but jealousy of Olga. This strange and most impulsive woman had had her love tricked as well as her judgment, and the love which she had had for Olga's brother was now transferred to me. Her chief fear was lest Olga was really to come between us. When she stopped, I tested her.

"You have found a ridiculous mare's nest," I said, with a short laugh; "and I have something more important to do than to listen to your fictions. If you think there is any truth in the thing, by all means tell all you know. But I warn you beforehand you will fail—fail ignominiously; and what is more, lose all you have said you wish to gain. My great object now is to get Olga out of the country, so that I may be free to carry out my plans."

She looked up as I spoke, and I saw the light of hope in her eyes.

"That you may follow her, I suppose you mean?"

"You can suppose what you please," I answered shortly. "If you wish to break off all between us by this ridiculous story, do so. But bear in mind, it is your act, not mine; and when once done, done irrevocably."

She wrung her hands in indecision.

"Can I trust you?"

"Can you get me a permit for Olga to leave the country?"

"Yes—alone." There was a world of meaning in that single word.

"Then get it; and as soon as a railway engine can drag her across the frontier, she will be out of Russia, and out of my way, much to my relief."

She sat silent in perplexity.

"You can't go! You shan't go!" she cried. "You have made me do these things, whoever you are, and you must stay—for me."

I smiled. I had won. Then I changed, as it were, to a rather fanatical Nihilist, and cried enthusiastically;

"The ties that keep me here, Paula, are ties of death and blood; and such as no woman's hand can either fashion or destroy."

She looked at me long and intently and put her hands on my arm and her face close up to mine, and said in a soft, seductive tone:

"If I get that permit, all shall be as it was?"

"All shall be as it was, Paula," I answered, adopting her equivocal phrase, and bent and kissed her on the forehead. But I was playing for a big stake: Olga's life probably, and my own certainly; and I could not afford the luxury of absolute candor at that crisis of the game.

But I did not win without conditions.

"I will get it," she said; "but you remember what I told you before. I repeat it now. You are more surely mine than ever; more surely than ever in my power, Alexis." She emphasized the word and a glance showed me her meaning. "And we must be married secretly within three days."

"As you will," I replied; and I felt glad that in a measure her resort to this compulsion gave me a sort of justification for misleading her.

In less than three days' time the Czar's visit would be over and I should either be dead or out of Russia.

But Olga would be saved; and that would be much.

CHAPTER XXIII.—CHECKMATE!

As soon as Paula Tueski left me I went round to Olga to endeavor to solve the riddle of the woman's discovery. Olga was out and would not return for an hour. Leaving word that I wished to see her particularly, and

that she was to wait for me, I went for a walk to try and set in order my thoughts.

Finding myself near the Princess Weletsky's house, and knowing that I had to keep up the semblance of attentions there, I called. She received me with marks of the most warm regard and welcome.

"I have heard much of what happened at that wretched Devinsky's house," she said. "Old Fedor, who went with you, told me much and my brother much also; but I would rather hear all from you. Where is Olga? You were wounded, I hear. What was it? Tell me—tell me. I have been dying with anxiety for you."

I told her shortly what had happened, and then it occurred to me to try to get her help in regard to Olga. I drew a fancy picture of Olga's shattered nerves; that Moscow had become a place of terror to her; and that even Russia itself was distasteful to her for a time on Devinsky's account.

"Do you think that a man like Devinsky would dare to lay so much as a finger on one of our family?" she asked, checkmating me quietly with a single pronoun.

"It's not what Devinsky dares, but what Olga fears."

"She did not strike me as a girl of nervous fears."

"No; she does not show it even to me."

"Then we can do better than drive the poor child away from home—punish Devinsky. Tell her that he is already under arrest."

"Is that so, indeed?" I asked, in some astonishment.

"Certainly his murderous attack on you when you were on the emperor's special duty is a crime that will cost him dear. Those who play us false, Lieutenant Petrovitch, must beware of us. But our friends find the ways made easy for them. Did not my brother tell you that Olga was to be protected as one of us, and therefore avenged, if wronged?"

"She will be glad to feel safe," I replied quietly. I knew what she meant; and with a look that seemed to imply much, I added: "I am glad to be one of your friends." I was getting such an adept in the suggestion of a lie, that much more practice would make it difficult for me to tell the plain truth.

My companion flushed with pleasure.

"I always felt I should not count on you in vain," she said.

"No woman has ever done that, I trust," was my answer. "No woman ever could for whom I felt as I feel for you." And with that, and a little more to the same effect, I left her.

I went round to Olga's at once. It was a blessing to be where there need be no secret meanings and insinuations.

She received me, of course, with a smile.

"Is this a pretense to see me, or really something?" she asked, with a laugh.

"I think it is really something or I should not have dared to be back so quickly. Even brothers may be bores."

Her answer was a pretty one, such as might be expected from a lover, but I need not repeat it.

"First, I will tell you the news," I said, after a pause ; and I told her about the arrest of Devinsky.

"These people strike swiftly and secretly, Alexis," she said thoughtfully. "They frighten me. Their power is almost limitless. How hard they will hit, and how far the blow will reach, if they ever find we are fooling them !" She sighed.

"The frontier is their limit, and we must pass it."

"I have been out today to make the preparations for flight. I suppose I must go?" She smiled a sad little note of interrogation at me. "And if so, the sooner the better. I have a disguise and shall start tonight. My difficulty will be, of course, at the frontier ; but I am going to stop short of that by one station, and then as a peasant girl try to get over on foot. It will take a little longer, but it is the only chance."

"No, I have good news for you so far as that is concerned. Madame Tueski will get you a permit in some name or other, and then you can cross in the train. Far better."

"You have seen her, then, today?" A shadow of her old feelings crossed Olga's face as she asked this.

"Yes, I have seen her, and she is eager now that you shall get out of the country."

She was very quick witted and read my meaning instantly from my words and tone.

"Tell me everything. There is more bad news yet to be told. Has she guessed— Ah, I always feared that woman."

"Tell me, Olga, ought I to have any special mark on either of my arms. Any birth mark, or anything of that sort?"

She went white instantly.

"I had forgotten. That wretched woman's initials were tattooed in small letters just there"—she put her finger on the place. "I saw it once, and Alexis was wild with me. Has she seen your arm bare?"

"My wound," I said, in explanation.

"Oh, dear, through me again—through me again !" cried the girl, in distress. I took her in my arms to soothe her, and tried to make her understand that after all it was really a good thing that had happened and not a bad one, inasmuch as the woman's jealousy was urging her to help in getting Olga away. I told her everything frankly.

But this was not all a clear course, as may be imagined. Olga loved me very dearly, and trusted me, I believe, as implicitly as any woman could trust the man she loved. But she was a woman and not a goddess ; and she could not bring herself to like the necessity which took her out of the country and left me behind in the clutches of such a woman as Paula Tueski. She was a very reasonable little soul, however, as well as a brave one ; and before I left her I had talked her into a condition of compulsory resignation.

I did not attempt to disguise from myself, though I did from Olga, the fact that her flight after my conversation with the princess would certainly tend to bring suspicion upon me if it should be discovered. Any secret step at such a juncture would do that. I thought I had better see the prince

himself, therefore, lest my neglect to do so should rouse his suspicions prematurely.

I went to him from Olga's house, and when I was admitted, after a little delay that I did not quite like, I found him as gracious as ever.

"I am very busy," he said, shaking hands with me, "but have time to hear that you have resolved to join us, lieutenant."

"I have come now only to thank you——"

"I haven't time to listen to that. Your sister is again in Moscow; her persecutor is in the care of my men; you have only to say a word, for her to be his judge. Do you say it?"

Seeing me hesitate, he paused only a moment.

"When a man like you doesn't say 'yes' directly, he means 'no.' I understand. But time is beginning to press with much force. Make up your mind, and don't come again till you have decided. Understand what that means. I can't see you until you are ready to say 'yes' or 'no' finally—finally. Then come, and if you decide 'no,' make it convenient, before you come, to arrange any little matters that can best be put right personally. You may find obstacles afterwards. You understand?" And the look which accompanied the words showed me that he meant all this as a pretty strong turn of the screw. "Oh, and by the by," he added, just as I was leaving the room, "of course you won't attempt to get away. You may if you like, you know, but you'll be wiser not, because I have certain information about you, and any attempt at flight at such a juncture as this would give me an excellent excuse for dealing very summarily. Understand—I shall only see you again when you are ready to give me your decision."

My anxiety for Olga was making me like a silly, frightened boy; and I went away from the man now with a chilled feeling of fear that set me doubting and speculating and anticipating a thousand forms of trouble which he could inflict upon her. I should not have a moment's peace of mind while Olga remained in Russia. That was certain.

I went back to my rooms and sat there thinking out moodily the particulars of the journey which the girl had to take alone, and my fears for her multiplied with almost every turn of my thoughts. Every detail of the position seemed to teem with additional menace and cause for alarm.

I had my own escape to think of, too. I resolved, let the risks be what they might, that the instant Olga's telegram came telling me she had crossed the frontier, I should bolt; and the manner and direction of my flight had cost me many an anxious hour.

I had been looking forward to the possible necessity of a hurried departure ever since I had started the venture, and I had had time thus to make my plans fairly complete. For this purpose I had used my Nihilist connections, though I had of course kept my whole plans to myself, since I had contemplated running away from the Nihilists as much as from any one else.

The chief difficulty was the geographical position of Moscow: the very kernel of Russia, and at tremendous distances from all the frontiers. My escape must be obviously a matter of the most careful planning, seeing that

I should probably be many weeks, and perhaps months, carrying it out. From the first I abandoned all thought of making a dash straight for the frontier by train. Every outlet of the kind would be watched most jealously, alike by the police and the Nihilists; while the fact of Olga slipping through would increase a thousandfold the vigilance to prevent my following.

If Paula Tueski managed to get the permit, Olga would make her escape quickly by train, going either northwest to St. Petersburg, and away by steamer, or west across the German frontier, or southwest down into Austria. Two days would do the business.

My escape was to be a very different affair.

I meant to leave Moscow on foot or pony back, disguised as a peasant woman, and as soon as I was well clear of the city, some twenty or thirty miles out, I intended to change that disguise and play the part of a horse dealer, making for the two big horse fairs that were coming on soon at Rostov and Jaroslav—about one hundred and one hundred and fifty miles north, respectively. For this purpose I proposed to buy up enough horses and ponies on my way to divert suspicion and sustain my part.

At Jaroslav I should sell these for what they would fetch, and in the confusion of the fair time change my character again. There I should strike the Volga, and my plan was to escape by river—to work my way on the boats down the Volga to Tsaritsin, and thence across by train to the Don. At the mouth of the Don, or at Taganrog, I calculated to be able to ship on a steamer across the Sea of Azov, and thence across the Black Sea, and out through the Bosphorus.

This was the outline, subject, of course, to any changes which necessity or expediency should suggest; and I preferred it because, if I could cut the trail between Moscow and the river, that was about the very last place in which I should be looked for; while the time that must be occupied on the river would give me the necessary opportunity for obtaining such papers as I should require to get away.

I had perfected the plan, thought out many of its details and discounted its risks, and had laid in many of the necessary disguises. But I was not destined to use them, for the direction of matters was wrested out of my hands by a stroke that checkmated me.

In the afternoon a letter came to me from Olga, vaguely worded, to the effect that Paula Tueski had sent for her, had given her what had been promised, and that all matters were now complete. She wished me to see her at seven o'clock.

I scribbled a line saying I would be there at the time.

The messenger, Olga's maid, went off with it; and almost before I thought she could have had time to get home and back again she came hurrying in again breathless and excited, and all white with fear.

I thought at first she had been molested in some way in the streets—Moscow is not Eden—and I asked her what was the matter.

The reply, uttered in gasps and jerks of terror, and with spasmodic sobs, filled me, in my turn, with consternation.

Olga had been arrested during the girl's absence, and my aunt, the

Countess Palitzin, was like a madwoman in her fear. She was all anxiety to see me.

"Arrested!" I cried, scarcely believing my own ears. "By whom? For what?"

"By the police. I don't know for what," wailed the girl. "But the countess——"

"I'll go to her at once," I cried, interrupting her; and without another word I set off at once for Olga's house with the greatest haste.

What could it all mean?

Whose blow was this? Coming at such a moment it shattered all my plans to fragments.

CHAPTER XXIV.—CRISIS.

I FOUND matters just as Olga's maid had told me. The countess was in the deepest distress, and was wringing her hands and crying herself blind in agitation and alarm.

Olga had been out in the afternoon, she told me, and had come back considerably excited. She had stayed some time in her room and the maid now said she had been turning over her clothes. I knew what this meant. Then she had written the letter to me and sent the girl with it; but the latter had scarcely left the house before the police had arrived, had asked for Olga, and had arrested her, refusing to say a single word as to the cause.

Olga had of course gone with them, protesting to the countess that there must be some mistake, and that no doubt she would soon be again at liberty and return home. When kissing her aunt the girl had whispered to her to tell me at once, with an assurance that she was not in the least frightened.

Knowing what I knew about the system of imprisonment in Russia, and how common a thing it was for a prisoner to be arrested on the flimsiest suspicion, to enter a jail and be kept from all communication with friends and family, I did not by any means share the calmness she had professed. The suddenness of the arrest, combined with the complete overthrow of all my plans, incensed me beyond measure. I put to the two women all the questions that occurred to me, but got no further light. I could not hide my concern, but I did my best to make the Countess Palitzin believe that it would be in my power to help Olga.

I hurried from the house to Paula Tueski. I reckoned to get from her the best hints as to where my exertions could be most usefully exerted. But I did not find her, and the news at her house was disconcerting. She had been called for suddenly and had gone out, leaving no word where she was to be found nor when she would return. All quite contrary to her usual custom.

I went on then to the chief police office. I was in uniform, of course, and was received with the greatest politeness, but no information was given to me. The man who granted me an interview was complacency itself.

"I am grieved to be able to give you no information, lieutenant," he said politely. "But you know how our hands are tied and how one's lips are sealed in this office. In anything but that matter I am your most obedient

servant; indeed, if in that very affair you can suggest how I can be of service, I pray you to command me."

"My sister was arrested by your men?" I asked.

"Most arrests are carried out by our men," was the reply.

"What is the charge against her?"

"I have not an idea."

"By whose orders was the arrest made?"

"By those of my superiors. I have but to obey."

"Where is she now?"

For answer he shrugged his shoulders, smiled blandly, and shook his head slowly.

"Can I see her?"

"Yes, of course—with an order."

"Whose order?"

"Any one who is my superior."

"Can you give me an order?" He repeated his gesture, murmuring an expression of regret.

"You have not told me much," I said, and he smiled deprecatingly.

"But it is enough to tell me where I must look for information."

His smile changed to one of congratulation, and rising he gave me his hand.

"Lieutenant, a brave man like you shall always command my sympathies and services so far as my duty permits;" and with that official reservation he bowed me out with the most profuse of polite gestures.

I thought I saw whence the stroke came, and without any longer delay I hurried to the Prince Bilbassoff.

He was at first said to be out; and for some half hour I cooled my heels and warmed my temper and impatience, striding up and down in front of the building. Then he was denied to me on the ground that he was very busily engaged; and only when I insisted that my business was exceptionally urgent and personal was I admitted to an antechamber and left waiting there with some half dozen other people.

The servant took my message, but instead of returning instantly, as had been my previous experience, to lead me at once to the prince's room, I was left to fume in my impatience for several minutes.

Then I rang the bell angrily, and when the servant came, ordered him to show me to the prince instantly. But he would not, saying he dared not without orders from his master, and that he had given my message and could do no more.

I augured ill from this reception, but was in no mood to brook delay. I had nothing to lose now by boldness, and as soon as the fellow had turned his back I went to that which I knew to be the door of the prince's room, and pushing aside the man who stood on guard outside, knocked, opened it, and marched in unceremoniously.

The prince was in close conference with a couple of men, and when he saw me he started up and asked me how I dared to intrude in that way.

"I have something urgent and private to say to you," said I coolly.

"If these gentlemen will give us five minutes it will be enough."

A moment's reflection sufficed to change his anger to equanimity, forced or genuine, I didn't care which, and he dismissed the men.

"There can be only one reason why you come here," he said, as soon as we were alone, speaking in a very sharp tone.

"On the contrary, there may be two," I replied, copying his sharpness.

"The only condition on which I can receive you, lieutenant, is the one I told you some hours since. Have you come to comply with it?"

"I have come to ask you why you have arrested my sister and where she is."

"Arrested whom?" he asked, with a sharp look I didn't understand.

"My sister."

"Who is that?" This with a smile of indescribable meaning.

"You knew well enough when I was here this afternoon."

"On the contrary, I knew then no more than I know now. I don't even know that you have a sister. Have you?"

Either the man was a lunatic or he knew everything. Here was obviously the reason of the altered reception. But I would not betray myself by a single word or gesture.

"I am speaking of my sister, Olga Petrovitch, whom you rescued from the hands of Major Devinsky. Now, do you know what I mean?"

"No," he answered stolidly.

"Well, do you know whom I mean?"

"I know of Olga Petrovitch."

"Then what the devil do you mean?" I cried angrily. "You have arrested her, haven't you?"

"She has been arrested," he answered quietly.

"What for?"

"You seem very anxious on her account."

"Would you have a man indifferent when his sister is whisked off to jail by these police devils of yours?"

"Indifferent? No, indeed; certainly not. Even I am not indifferent about it. It has been of the utmost use to me, in fact."

"How long are you going to keep up these riddles, prince? I don't pretend to be your equal at that kind of fence; and as it's perfectly evident to me you think you have a knotted whip for my back I'll wait till your ready to lay it on."

He laughed at that.

"Are you going to accept my conditions?" he asked.

"It will depend absolutely on the result of this interview."

He paused half a minute, and then taking a paper from his pocket tossed it to me with a laugh.

"Here's the key. How do you read it?" he asked lightly.

It was indeed the key, and the instant my eyes fell on it I saw everything.

It was the permit found on Olga. The game was up, but I wouldn't play the craven.

I tossed it back to him and laughed, a more natural and mirthful laugh than his, though I scented death in the air.

"I understand it pretty well," I said, as lightly as he had spoken. "But if you don't mind I think I'll keep my own counsel."

"You know what it means?" he asked.

"To me?"

He nodded.

"I can guess," I said.

"And to her?"

"No, I don't know that. But I know your law is confoundedly hard on women."

"And this Tueski woman—why did she get this permit for—your sister?" He paused on the word.

"Wanted her out of the way; that's all."

"Is what she says true—all true?"

"That depends on what she says."

"It's a strange tale. That you're not what you call yourself; that you've taken the place of Lieutenant Alexis Petrovitch; that you're a Nihilist of the Nihilists; that you murdered her husband; and that she has the proofs of all this."

"Why did you arrest her?" I asked, as an idea occurred to me.

"That," he said, pointing to the permit.

"Did she volunteer her statement?"

A laugh of diabolical cunning spread over his face.

"Yes—when she believed you had deceived her and had fled with—your sister. Boy, no one can guard himself against a jealous Russian woman."

"Now, I see a little more clearly. But why did you arrest Olga Petrovitch?"

"Your visit to my sister this afternoon. You were too solicitous for the poor girl's nerves, and we thought it might be better for you to know that she was in safe guardianship until you had made your decision. There would at any rate be no pressing need for you to think of her leaving the country; or feel it desirable to go with her to take care of her in her shattered condition. And we were right. But even I did not expect a tithe of all that has come from the step. It is indeed seldom that I get so genuine a surprise."

"And what are you going to do—now?"

"How much of this woman's tale is true?"

"One third of it. I am not Alexis Petrovitch; but neither am I a Nihilist nor a murderer."

"Who are you?"

"An Englishman. Hamylton Tregethner."

"But your speech—your accent, your Russian?"

"I was brought up in Moscow for the first sixteen years of my life."

"Tregethner, Hamylton Tregethner," he murmured, repeating the name as if it were not wholly unfamiliar to him. Then after a pause he asked me where the real Lieutenant Petrovitch was; and questioned me searchingly and very shrewdly as to the whole details of my change of identity. I concealed nothing.

"You English are devils," he said, when his questions were nearly exhausted. "I hate the lot of you—except you. And you're as big a devil as any of them. But you have the pluck of a hundred."

I shrugged my shoulders, laughed, lolled back in my chair and lighted a cigarette.

"I've enjoyed it," I said; "and that's the plain truth. I didn't like the lies I had to tell; but then I never had any training in the diplomatic service and that makes the difference. But all the same I've enjoyed it; and what's more, if it had been possible, I'd have fought for the Little Father as keenly as any born Russ in the ranks. But it's over, and so far as I'm concerned, you can do what you like with me. I should like to save that girl. She's one in ten thousand for pluck. And you owe her something, too; as she saved my life from a treacherous thrust of Devinsky's sword for you to take it. You might let her have her liberty in its place. It's infernally hard on the girl that her cowardly brute of a brother should let her in for all this mess; and then that I, with all the good will in the world, should thrust her deeper into the mud. It's blamed hard."

The prince was watching me closely and thinking hard.

"Why did you hesitate to accept my proposal?" he asked sharply.

"For a very plain reason. While I appreciated the honor and advantage of an alliance with your sister, I loved Olga Petrovitch, and preferred to marry her."

"I won't tell my sister that," he said, laughing sardonically. After a pause he added: "How much does—your sister know of our matter?"

"Everything."

"Names?" And he stared as if to penetrate right into my brain.

"No—not of the man to be fought."

"On your honor?"

"On my honor."

"If she is released, will you go on with it?"

"If she is put across the frontier," I returned grimly.

"Don't you trust me?"

"You, yes; but your agents, no."

He smiled.

"You should go far with the daring with which you push your fortunes."

"Probably I shall go on till my head falls by the wayside," I answered. I was utterly reckless now. But my tactics succeeded when nothing else could have won. He took a form and wrote.

"Here is the permit for her to leave the country. It is yours—on conditions."

"What are they? Never mind what they are," I added quickly. "I accept them in advance. Save that girl who is innocent, and do what you like with me."

"Do you know what I ought to do with you?" he asked.

"Yes; better than you do. Write me a permit also and have me conducted to the frontier at the same time. But I don't know what you think you should do."

"I ought to write out a very different order and have you both sent straight to the Mallovitch yonder, and let things take their course."

"Well, it's fortunate for me, then," I replied, with a laugh, "that your interest and your judgment pull different ways. You won't do that, prince."

"How do I know that you are not a Nihilist?"

"Instinct, judgment, knowledge of men—knowledge of me—everything. Besides, if you want proof, no one knows better than yourself that a cipher telegram sent to London, and inquiries made in half a dozen places that I can mention, will put ample proofs in your hands to show who I am. So far as I know, there's one man in Russia at the present moment, and actually coming to Moscow, who'll stir up the British legation and every British consulate in the country in the search for Hamylton Tregethner. That's the Hon. Rupert Balestier." Then I told him what had happened in Paris. At first he smiled, but soon grew thoughtful again.

"I warn you, too," I added, when he made no answer, "that if you chop my head off, or stifle me in one of your infernal prisons, or send me packing to Siberia, Balestier is just the man to raise a devil of a clatter. And you don't want a row with our foreign office just at the moment when things are so ticklish with the Sick Man."

He waved his hand as if to put all such considerations away from him.

"If the girl had got away, did you mean to try to escape?"

"Certainly," replied I frankly; and I told him the scheme I had formed.

"And now?"

"If I give my word I shall keep it. You Russians never seem to think a man will keep his parole to his own disadvantage. We English think differently—and act as we think."

"If we postpone this talk till tomorrow, have I your word that you'll make no attempt to escape?"

"No, indeed, you haven't. Let this girl go at once; then you can have it and welcome."

"You seem to forget that I can keep you under guard?"

"I forget nothing of the kind. Clap me into a prison and you may whistle for any one to carry out—to do what you wish. You can decide now, or lose the option. That's in the rules of a game like this."

"You carry things with a high hand," he cried angrily.

"Most probably I shouldn't be here if I didn't," said I, with a laugh. "It's my advantage to force the pace at this juncture; and the risk's too big to throw away a single chance."

He made no reply, but pushing back his chair got up and walked about the room in a state of indecision, absolutely foreign to his character and habits.

I knew how momentous the decision was. If I were the dangerous Nihilist that Paula Tueski had declared, the risk of letting me free and intrusting to me such a task as that we had discussed was critical and deadly. The Russian instinct was to clap me into prison and be done with me; but the personal feeling pulled him in the other direction—to use me for a tool in the project that was all in all to him. With the grand duke

once out of his path there was nothing between him and almost absolute rule.

I watched him with an anxiety he little suspected, for my manner was studiously careless, indifferent, and reckless.

"Did you give this girl any particular task if she escaped?" he asked, stopping suddenly in his walk close to me.

"Certainly; to find Rupert Balestier, tell him of my position, and get him to try and smooth away the difficulties.

He took the answer as I gave it with perfect frankness, and it seemed to help his decision; and he resumed his pacing backwards and forwards.

Two or three minutes later he stopped his walk, and taking the permit he had written held it out to me.

"Will you give me your word as an English gentleman that if I give you this, and allow the girl to leave Russia, you will make no attempt to escape, and will go on with the proposal we have discussed?"

"No, I cannot," I said, after a moment's thought. "An Englishman cannot lend himself out as an assassin, Prince Bilbassoff. I will do this. I will give you my word of honor not to attempt to leave Russia, and if a meeting between the grand duke and myself can be arranged without dishonor to me, I pledge myself to meet him. I will never take that word back unless you release me; but more I cannot do. Let Olga Petrovitch go, and you shall do as you will with me."

"I take your word," he said quietly. "Your identity will remain unknown. Your sister will leave for the frontier under escort at midnight; but when away she will make no effort to bring any kind of help to you. You can take the news to her, and she can leave with you to make her arrangements for departure. I hold you responsible for her; and you will explain only what is necessary to her. You remain a Russian."

I went out from the interview impregnated with the conviction that I was now indeed hopelessly baffled. I saw how completely the whole position had been changed. The very axis had shifted. And the knowledge that I had to make Olga understand it all before she left Russia was more unpalatable and depressing than I can describe.

Up to the present moment there had indeed been the slight off chance that we should both escape, and the knowledge that if we could only do so we might find happiness in another country. But that hope was as dead as a coffin nail. I was bound to Moscow by a shackle more powerful than iron fetters. I had pledged myself not to attempt to go until the prince himself had given me permission; and I knew that he would never think of doing this until the duel had been in some way arranged. On the other hand, the Nihilist attack on the emperor was to be made in two days' time. If it succeeded, an ignominious death at the hands of the law could be the only result for me; while if it failed, death was as certain at the hands of the Nihilists.

Between the upper and nether millstones I was helpless; certain only of being crushed by one or the other.

Arthur W. Marchmont.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

MY COWBOY MESSMATE.

The worth of Texan plains' training on board a merchantman—How a "landlubber" won glory from shipmates who at first were only disposed to guy.

I SAW him first on the dock at Galveston, while the Sollowell was loading for Liverpool. It was the day before we sailed; the cargo was all stowed, things were clewed up, and the old brig looked pretty natty. Captain Traverse was mighty particular about looking well when we cleared and entered port. The Sollowell always looked like a girl in holiday attire when we tripped our anchor.

There wasn't much to do, and those of us who were aboard were lying about the deck, taking it easy on our last day in port. Sam Collins was near me, and taking his pipe from his mouth and pointing with its stem to the shore, he says:

"Look-er yonder, Mark. See that, sawney?"

I glanced over the rail. There on the wharf stood about the longest legged individual I'd ever seen. He was lean and not a little bow legged, and the fringed trousers and beaded leggings he wore made his pipe stem nether limbs look ridiculous enough. He was dressed in regular cowboy fashion—big hat, woollen shirt, belt, enormous spurs, and all, and at his hip was slung a revolver, longer than a marlinspike.

He was staring at the brig with evident curiosity, and his eyes—snapping black eyes they were—took her all in, from truck to keelson. While Sam and I were chuckling over his appearance, he strode up to the edge of the dock and looked over at us.

"How air ye, gents?" he said.

"Hullo, sawney!" returned Sam. "Never saw salt water before, did ye?"

I gave him a sharp nudge and a warning look. I'd heard that most of those cow punchers were always spoiling for a fight, and a sailor's fists wouldn't stand much show against that seven shooter.

"No, I never did," admitted the stranger. "Been cow punching all my life. But I reckon I'd like to see suthin' of it."

"Why don't you ship?" asked Sam, on a broad grin. "Men are scarce, an' the old man's looking for one or two more to make up the crew."

"I been thinkin' of it—I sure have," declared the Texan, and he wandered on, still staring at the brig's tapering masts and her multitudinous shrouds and running gear. But we *were* surprised, when Captain Traverse came aboard about dark with two additions to the crew, to recognize in one of them our cowboy acquaintance—sombbrero, spurs, seven shooter, and all!"

Collins and some of the others started right in to have lots of fun with Jim—his name was Jim Ledward—but somehow the fun didn't materialize.

Although he was so green, he was sharper than a needle and usually turned their gibes and jokes back upon themselves. Collins wanted to know that evening, as we sat about the mess table and smoked, if he brought his horse hair lariat aboard to lasso a whale.

"No; I'm goin' to lasso you fellows an' drop yer overboard w'en yer get *too* overbearin'," growled Jim.

I could see he was getting riled and I tried to draw the boys off; but they kept at it, Sam especially. Jim's freckled face grew whiter and his black eyes glittered dangerously.

Suddenly, just as Sam applied a particularly cutting epithet to him, Jim, who had sat doubled up like a jack knife on the edge of his berth through it all, made a leap across the forecandle and grasped Collins around the waist. He moved like a lightning flash, and although Sam was a big fellow, weighing upward of two hundred, he lifted him from the floor with apparently as little effort as he would a child.

Sam, who was a good deal of a bully, swore and reached for his knife; but Jim held him so he couldn't do that and raised him fairly above his head, until the big fellow's boots beat a tattoo on the deck of the forecandle.

"I may be green," remarked Jim steadily, "but I don't 'low no man to wipe his feet on me. Just say where you want'er fall, mister, fur I'm a-goin' ter drop ye!"

Sam only swore and struggled the more, and with an ease which plainly showed the enormous strength of the erstwhile cowboy, Ledward threw the sailor half across the forecandle. Sam landed like a ton of bricks against the bulkhead and dropped back to the floor with a shock which must have started the very teeth in his head. It looked as though there would be serious trouble in the forecandle for a few moments, but the cooler headed among us prevailed and further difficulty was averted.

But Sam did not forgive his antagonist, despite the fact that he had brought his undoing upon himself. He couldn't understand how that long legged, spindle shanked youngster (Jim wasn't more than twenty three or four) could have so easily mastered him, and fairly *ached* to try issues with him again. But Ledward was built of steel springs and had muscles like wire cables; he had lived the active life of a cowboy since his twelfth year and the hard work aboard the old Sollowell was play to him.

We met a stiff gale just after getting out of the Galveston Roads, but our cowboy sailor didn't turn a hair. And afterward, when I had occasion to ride a couple of hundred miles over a Texas plain, I knew why. A man who had *that* experience behind him would never be troubled by seasickness.

Jim learned his ropes in short order, and after being prevailed upon to shift his boots and spurs for canvas slippers, went aloft like a monkey. Before we got out of the Gulf he would go anywhere aloft.

One day the brig was rolling along before a pretty sharp breeze, the tops of the waves frequently dashing over the rails, for there was a heavy ground swell on. The mate wanted to shake out another reef or two and sent the watch aloft. Jim was one of the first to the main yard, and as the old Sollowell listed to port he pitched headforemost down the slanting spar, whose extreme

end almost touched the water. I thought for a moment the boy was going overboard.

"Good heavens! look-er that!" cried the mate.

I glanced over the side and there, keeping along with the vessel, was a big, white bellied shark. As the brig rolled and Jim slid down the yard, that wicked eyed old sea lawyer flopped over and snapped at his shadow—and Jim himself was less than two feet away!

Jim saw the fish, and with a grin on his face waited for the next roll. When it came he slipped down the yard again and the shark turned belly up at his shadow as before. The daredevil fellow leaned over and shot the tobacco he had been chewing straight into the huge, open mouth.

"What are you about, you foolhardy rascal?" yelled the mate. "Get back off that yard."

Jim came down with a grin on his face. He had been within a couple of feet of death, yet he didn't give it a second thought. I doubt if he knew what fear was.

We couldn't help liking him—all of us but Sam Collins. Sam couldn't forget the first night of Jim's sojourn among us. But when we got through the straits we had enough to think of beside any petty squabbles. The Sollowell was heavily loaded with cotton, and Florida was scarcely out of sight when a storm struck us and followed us mighty nigh to the Mersey.

Captain Traverse was a "close" man and always loaded to the line. The brig was all right in fair weather, but the minute the wind and waves rose she began to stagger. Beside the cotton in the hold, we carried a deck load amidships, piled up so high that we could scarcely work the big sails. It rained heavily the first two days, and what with the spray that washed over us, the cotton bales were pretty well saturated. And when cotton is wet it weighs like lead.

On the third day we lay so low in the water that every wave washed over us, and then Captain Traverse was finally prevailed upon by the mate to throw a part of the deck load overboard. That lightened the Sollowell considerably, and she shook her decks dry and rode the waves less like a water soaked log.

But I never saw such waves as met us at that time. After the wind had been blowing from the same point for pretty near a week the sea ran fairly mountains high. The old brig staggered up one foam streaked height to shoot down into the trough beyond like a toboggan down a chute.

The gale drove us on before it in just the right direction, however, and at the end of a week we were a long way toward our objective port. I was at the wheel one forenoon when a wave broke over our bow and smashed things up generally. There is a fearful weight and power in water when it falls in bulk. Our bulwarks were smashed in two places, and the cabin light was broken and the officers' quarters set all a-wash from this single wave. Men were carried off their feet, and everything that wasn't lashed went over the rail with the outgoing sea.

I twirled the wheel with all the strength of my arms to bring the brig's head up, and as I did so I heard a yell forward:

"Man overboard!"

It's a cry that, once heard, rings in one's ears for months. With a gale such as we were experiencing howling across the ocean, and the waves running as they were, it looked sure death to drop over the brig's rail. I got a brief glimpse of a struggling figure just off our port bow. Somebody had fallen from the heel of the bowsprit, and it was a marvel the hull hadn't struck the man and killed him outright as he went down.

Everybody who could rushed to the port rail—men and officers together. Somebody pitched over a life belt and the mate tried to cast a rope to the man; but both fell short. Just then the Sollowell began to sink by the head and we coasted down one of those huge waves. We went by the half drowned wretch with a rush and I caught a glimpse of his white, fear stricken face. It was Sam Collins!

I had all I could do to keep the wheel steady, but I was aware that somebody had come out of the forecastle with a coil of rope in his hand and was running aft. When I looked again I recognized Jim Ledward. He held the coil of his horsehair lariat in his left hand, and was swinging the slack around his head preparatory for a cast.

The Sollowell faltered a moment at the bottom of the decline, while the long green slope rose before us like a hill. I glanced swiftly over my shoulder. The mountainous wave behind was curled over until its boiling crest seemed fairly to hang over my head, and there, half out of the water, was the body of poor Sam Collins!

I shouted aloud. It looked as though wave, man, and all were about to descend upon the wheel!

Mechanically I clung to the spokes, but I gave the old brig up for lost, and her crew with her. As I turned to look forward again there was a flash before my eyes. Jim had made his cast.

Then with a roar as of bursting thunder the wave broke, but the Sollowell, like a steed urged by whip and spur, had bounded forward and was half up the slope of the next one. As in a dream, I saw Jim run to the rail and the mate follow him. They hauled something in, hand over hand, and Jim and another sailor carried it below. The mate came to me and took the wheel.

"A blessed close shave, that, Mark!" he bawled in my ear. "You look done up, man; go below."

And I went. I found Collins sitting up in his bunk, being dosed with something strong and hot, and looking about as a fellow does who has been snatched from the very jaws of death. Jim was coolly wiping his precious lariat with an old blouse and coiling it down on the mess table.

I sat down weakly on the lower step of the forecastle ladder and looked at him. He looked up and saw my white face, and grinned cheerfully.

"It's mighty handy to have a no-count cow puncher along on shipboard once in a while," he said.

But nobody aboard the Sollowell ever geyed Jim about his cow punching experiences again.

Marcus D. Richter.

THE RIVER OF DARKNESS.*

A record of some marvelous experiences in the Dark Continent—Why a water journey beneath the earth's surface was undertaken at frightful risks—A voyage on a raft along an unknown course and without the possibility of retreat.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

GUY CHUTNEY, an officer in the British army, on his way back to service in India, is asked to stop off at Aden and take important despatches to Sir Arthur Ashby, governor of Zaila, on the African coast. En route the steamer touches at Berbera, where Chutney meets an old friend, Melton Forbes, foreign correspondent of an English newspaper. Suspecting that there is treachery in the wind, Forbes sends his native servant Momba through the town to investigate, who soon after returns pursued by a mob of Somali warriors. It appears that Manuel Torres, a Portuguese fellow passenger of Guy on the Aden steamer, has brought rifles to Makar Makalo, who is instigating rebellion against the English on behalf of Rao Khan, Emir of Harar.

Melton, with his servant, accompanies Guy to Zaila; their report carries consternation to the breast of the governor and Colonel Carrington, who is with him. The Arabs are already swarming about the place, the Englishmen are all made prisoners, and doomed by Makar Makalo to be sent as slaves to the Somalis of the Galla country. During the journey the prisoners are separated, Guy and Melton being carried by the Arabs to Harar, where the Emir is forced to promise the people that they shall be sent to the block in four days' time. Meantime they are waited upon in their cell (Melton having been wounded) by Canaris, a Greek, who has been a captive of the Emir for two years. He shows them a document given him by an aged Englishman, who had died in the prison, and which tells of an underground river in the neighborhood which promises them all escape. On an appointed night they overpower the guards and start.

They finally reach the entrance to the underground river—guided to it by a fleeing Galla who makes his escape thereby from a party of Abyssinians. But their provisions have been exhausted and they know not what to do until, in one of their night exploring trips, they capture two stray camels, which inspires Chutney with an idea which may mean the rescue of their friends from the Gallas, near whose camp they now know themselves to be. Staining their faces to make themselves pass as Portuguese, he and Canaris ride in among the Gallas, declare that they have been sent from Zaila by Makar Makalo, who is hard pressed by the British, and that the latter will only withdraw on condition that the governor of the town and his friends, who have been sold into slavery, be delivered up to these messengers, with provisions enough to last them on the return journey to Zaila. The plan, by happy chance, is successful, and with Sir Arthur and Colonel Carrington they return to the mouth of the cavern. The Gallas, knowing they are tricked, pursue them, but Chutney checks them effectually by blowing up the entrance to the subterranean waterway, this making the whole party prisoners underground. They find two canoes on this river of darkness, and embarking in them, follow the current. After a journey of several days, a terrible adventure with a serpent, and the loss of one canoe, they shoot some rapids and find themselves on a great underground lake. Finally they run the canoe up on a sandy beach, and Chutney, torch in hand, springs out to explore. After one look, he turns back with a horror stricken face.

CHAPTER XXVI.—THE ISLE OF SKELETONS.

BELEIVING that some terrible danger threatened, Forbes was in readiness to push the canoe back into the lake, but Guy stopped him with a wave of the hand.

**This story began in the May issue of THE ARGOSY. The four back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 40 cents.*

"I'll be all right in a moment. My nerves went back on me ; that's all."

He glanced toward the shore with a shudder, and then filled the palm of his hand with water and drank it.

"Come on," he said bravely ; "don't be alarmed. It's nothing that can harm us."

His companions followed him timidly up the sandy slope. The torch threw a bright light on the scene, and every one of them shuddered as Guy stopped and pointed before him.

On a flat, rocky plateau, three or four feet above the level of the lake, lay a gleaming mass of bones, all dried and whitened by age.

"Human skeletons, by gracious !" burst from the colonel, and it was easy to see that he spoke the truth.

Human skeletons they were, but instead of being joined together, skulls, arms, and legs lay scattered about in awful confusion.

"This is horrible," said Forbes. "Who were these unfortunates, and what could have caused such mutilation?"

Guy advanced to the center of the plateau, flashing the torch around him, and turning to his companions, he cried : "This is an island ; there is water all around it."

"Look here," exclaimed Canaris eagerly ; "here lies a raft of logs, half buried in the sand."

This new discovery promised some light on the mystery, and they crowded hastily around the Greek, who was bending over the rude structure.

It lay half way up the beach, and over the lower extremities of the logs a thick layer of sand had been washed. Close by were half a dozen coarse sacks, which proved on inspection to contain skins of leopards and tigers, bright colored feathers, coffee, and aromatic gums. All were in fairly good condition.

"Here is something else," cried Forbes. "Arms, by Jove ! Spears and axes, torches and paddles. Well, by gracious, what does this mean?"

An inkling of the truth flashed upon them simultaneously, and they stared at each other in frightened silence.

"This was the last load of natives to go down the river," said Canaris quietly. "Here is their raft, their trading goods. Yonder lies their bones. Their journey ended here."

"And why did it end here?" demanded the colonel.

"Yes, why?" echoed Chutney, and then no one spoke for a full minute.

"What was to prevent them from continuing on their way?" resumed the colonel finally. "They had a raft and paddles ; the water was all around them. What caused their death?"

"Starvation," suggested the Greek, and they snatched eagerly at this solution.

"It was not starvation that killed them," exclaimed Guy, who had turned back to the center of the island. "Here is a bag of dates and dried meat all shriveled and moldy. They met their death in some horribly sudden fashion, that is certain. How do you account for their skeletons being torn apart and the bones flung together? Could starvation do that?"

"It was serpents," said the Greek; and that brief sentence made their blood run cold.

"Yes," continued Canaris, observing the doubt in their faces; "they must have been surprised in the night and crushed to death. That alone can account for their broken bones. But, remember, all this was thirty years ago or more."

"Yes, you are right, Canaris," said Chutney. "I believe, upon my word, what you say is true. The monstrous serpents of the cavern devoured them."

Sir Arthur beat a rapid retreat to the canoe, and the rest were not slow in following his example.

"Let us get away from this horrible spot as quickly as possible," said the colonel; "and, besides, we are losing precious time on this lake. We must seek the outlet at once and resume the journey."

They paddled gladly away from the Isle of Skeletons, as the colonel insisted on naming it, and steered as straight a course as possible.

Under the pressure of four paddles the canoes maintained a rapid speed, but in spite of this it was fully an hour, and probably much more, before they found the shore of the lake. They rested a little while beside the perpendicular wall of rock, uncertain which way to turn.

"It won't make much difference," said Guy; "either course must bring us to the outlet. Suppose we try the right."

This proposition met with favor, and off they started once more, taking care to keep the shore constantly in sight, lest they should lose their bearings again.

In less than half an hour the sound of running water was heard in the distance, and they paddled faster than ever in their intense longing to escape from the lake.

Louder and louder grew the roar of the water, until they seemed to be almost upon it, and just when they were preparing for a dash into the rapids Chutney rose in the canoe with a cry of surprise, and the torchlight showed plainly a fierce body of water running, not out of, but into the lake.

They had come back to the starting point. It was here they had entered the lake, and now all must be done over again.

"Back water," cried the colonel. "Don't get into the current. It may sweep us out and we shall lose our bearings. Turn the canoe and we will go back the way we came."

There was no help for it. It only remained to atone for the lost time by paddling as rapidly as possible.

With difficulty the canoe was snatched from the influx of the current and headed this time to the left.

"It will be a lengthy paddle," said Guy. "The lake is by no means a small one."

"I'm hungry," exclaimed Sir Arthur. "Isn't it about time for lunch?"

"Your suggestion is eminently proper, Sir Arthur," declared the colonel. "On a full stomach we shall travel faster, Chutney. Do you concur with our views?"

Guy evidently did, for a supply of dates and crackers was forthwith produced, and while they were eating the canoe was permitted to remain stationary.

They started away in somewhat better spirits, Chutney in the bow keeping a sharp watch for danger ahead, while Sir Arthur held his torch from the stern, lighting the water for some yards around.

The dreary monotony of the journey was most trying. The shore presented an unbroken perpendicular wall of stone falling sheer to the water, damp and slimy with drippings, while overhead was empty space, a dome of vast height, to judge from the echo of their voices.

They paddled on and on, pausing occasionally to rest their weary arms, then dashing away with more vigor than ever. Not for an instant did they lose sight of the shore. It was their only guide. At last Sir Arthur's arm dropped feebly, and it was seen that he was half asleep. Canaris took the torch from his hand, and sinking into the bottom of the canoe, the ex-governor fell instantly into a deep slumber.

"I'm actually getting drowsy myself," confessed the colonel. "It must be night. Surely we ought to be half way round the lake by this time."

Guy admitted that he, too, was beginning to grow sleepy, and as Forbes and Canaris alone professed to be as fresh as ever, it was decided that they should navigate the canoe for a time and allow the others an opportunity to rest.

Chutney and the colonel stretched themselves on the rugs and Melton paddled slowly forward, while Canaris held the torch from the stern.

Hours passed, and still they continued to follow the rocky shore amid silence, broken only by the swish of the paddle, for neither Forbes nor Canaris cared to converse.

Wrapped in their own gloomy reflections they crouched in the stern, keeping silent vigil over their sleeping companions.

An intense desire for sleep now laid hold on Melton, and with great reluctance he woke Guy and the colonel. It required a dash of cold water to bring them to their senses.

"Are we still on this horrible lake?" exclaimed Chutney. "How long have we been asleep?"

"Several hours at least," replied Melton.

"Several hours? Whew! What a lake this is! We must surely be near the outlet now. But you are sleepy and worn out, Melton, and so is Canaris. Look, he can hardly keep his eyes open. Go lie down, both of you. The colonel and I will see to the canoe, and you will wake up twenty miles down the river."

Melton handed over his paddle to Guy, and the colonel relieved the Greek of the torch.

Canaris was asleep almost instantly, and Melton was just arranging the rugs to make himself a comfortable spot, when Chutney cried gladly, "I can hear water running. I'm sure of it. Do you hear it, too, colonel?"

"Yes," said the colonel, after a pause. "I do hear something, that's a fact. We are approaching the outlet of the lake, no doubt of it."

Melton's drowsiness vanished instantly, and he sprang up.

"It would be advisable to waken Canaris and Sir Arthur," suggested the colonel. "No one ought to sleep at a time like this. All hands may be needed."

A slight touch woke the Greek, but it required a severe shaking to rouse Sir Arthur.

"Waiter, a deviled kidney and a pint of Pommery Sec," he cried drowsily, as Chutney pulled him to a sitting position. And then opening his eyes he groaned dismally, "Bless me, I thought I was dining at Gatti's. Why didn't you let me sleep?"

CHAPTER XXVII.—ALL HOPE VANISHES.

"WE are approaching the outlet of the lake, Sir Arthur," said Guy. "It is better that all should be awake in case we encounter bad water."

"Yes, yes; very true. You want me to hold the torch, I suppose. Gad! what a dream I had! I was dining with Lord Balsover. I'd give my title and fortune to be back in London this minute."

"Hold your torch straight," said the colonel dryly, and then under the regular strokes of four paddles the canoe moved swiftly toward the distant sound of running water.

Every instant it grew louder and more distinct, and soon their voices were almost drowned in the roar.

It was a period of terrible anxiety. That it was the outlet of the lake they were approaching no one for an instant doubted. Their chief concern was for a safe passage into the river beyond, for the angry splash of the water told plainly its turbulent and dangerous nature.

"Keep a little off from the shore," cried Guy. "It won't do to make too sharp a curve or we shall upset. We must strike the current fairly in the center and keep the canoe straight as an arrow. Whatever happens, don't drop the torch," he added warningly.

Close as they now were to the outlet, no signs of any current were yet visible. The colonel called attention to this strange fact, but Guy explained it by remarking that the current probably passed directly through the center of the lake, and that dead water continued to the very edge.

"I can see a white gleam ahead," he cried suddenly; "now paddle off from shore a little more and head the canoe as I tell you."

His orders were obeyed in silence. Straight out from the shore the canoe shot deftly. A couple of quick strokes forward and backward and its bow faced the angry waters that raged and foamed thirty yards distant.

The radius of the torch cast a faint gleam on the very edge of the glistening spray. It seemed to beckon them onward.

"Now give way," cried Guy. Four paddles dipped and rose as one, the shining drops rolled from their blades like so many diamonds in the torch glare, and then Guy sprang to his feet with a loud cry.

The paddles wavered in mid air. "Go ahead," he shouted fiercely. "Paddle with all your strength."

Once more they dipped the water, the canoe moved slowly—with an effort, and as the paddles a second time paused in air, the canoe shot swiftly—not forward to the embrace of the angry waters, but back—*back at dizzy speed into the dark and dismal recesses of the lake.*

Even then the awful, unspeakable horror of the situation never flashed upon them, Guy alone perhaps excepted.

"We've blundered again," cried the colonel in hollow tones. "We have returned to the starting point. In some manner we have missed the outlet, and now all must be done over again."

"Could the canoe have been turned completely about during our journey?" exclaimed Forbes.

"Impossible," said the colonel. "I can prove it instantly. When we started away from the spot where the river enters on our trip around the lake, the shore was on our right. When we arrived here just now it was still on our right, whereas had we unconsciously turned the canoe about and reversed our course the shore would be on our left. We have circumnavigated the lake and returned to our starting point, and in some way missed the outlet."

"No," cried Chutney in tones that chilled his hearers with horror. "We did not miss the outlet."

"What do you mean?" cried the colonel.

"I say we did not miss the outlet," continued Guy, "because there was no outlet to miss. No exit from the lake exists. We are entombed forever and ever. None of us will ever see the light of day again. We shall die here in the bowels of the earth, and the serpents will mangle us as they mangled those poor unfortunates yonder on the island. Better to know the truth now than later. It is useless to hope. I tell you we are doomed men and——" Here Guy's voice faltered, and sinking down into the canoe, he covered his face with his hands.

Sir Arthur uttered a heartrending cry and fell back in a faint. He lay unnoticed. The torch dropped from the Greek's nerveless hands and expired with a hiss. In darkness and silence they floated on and on until the roar of the inflowing water became fainter and fainter. Then it died out entirely and all was intensely quiet.

The darkness was grateful to their stricken hearts. They wanted time to realize this awful misfortune that had fallen so suddenly and heavily upon them.

It was impossible to grasp the truth in a moment, especially when that truth meant utter hopelessness and a terrible death. So they drifted in silence under the great vault of the cavern, living dead in a living tomb.

Long afterwards—it might have been an hour and it might have been a day, for all passage of time was lost—Chutney staggered to a sitting posture.

His brain was dizzy and reeling. The aching misery lay heavy on his heart, and yet one faint spark of hope lingered amid the black despair, the natural buoyancy of his nature that refused even to submit to the decrees of the inevitable.

It was he who had first spoken the words of doom to his companions,

and now he told himself he would show them the way to safety. He fumbled in his clothes for a match, and striking it deliberately, lit a flash torch.

The pale, haggard faces that looked into each other as the bright light shone over the water were ghastly and unnatural. Abject misery and hopelessness were stamped on each one.

The colonel and Forbes faced Guy calmly. Canaris looked up with a shudder and then dropped his head again. Sir Arthur lay among the rugs as though asleep.

At that instant the canoe struck some obstacle with a slight tremor and stopped.

The colonel with a slight gesture pointed to the right, and there before them lay the *Isle of Skeletons*. A strange fatality had drifted them a second time to this awful spot.

Guy shuddered, but the colonel rose, and brushing past him stepped on shore.

Forbes followed him in silence, and then Canaris staggered blindly past.

After a brief hesitation Guy stepped out, and dragged the canoe half way up the sand. Sir Arthur never moved. He was sleeping and no one dared disturb him. They sat down in a row on the sand.

"It's as good a place as any to die," said Forbes hoarsely. "The bones will soon have company."

He paused, frightened at his own voice, and no one replied. For a while they sat in silence.

Guy stuck the torch in the sand and it blazed away with a merry light. Somehow or other the ray of hope that had animated him a little while before had vanished, leaving only a dull despair, a reluctance to face the horror of the situation.

"Is there no—no chance—for us?" he ventured to say timidly.

"Absolutely none," replied the colonel, in a firm voice. "You told us a while ago, Chutney, that our doom was sealed. I have faced the situation as calmly and clearly as possible from every conceivable aspect, and I now tell you on my own responsibility that we will never leave this cavern. The fatal error was made when we took the right hand channel of the two, or rather when the current led us to the right. That was not our blunder, of course. We were in the hands of destiny. We are now, as you know, on the bottom of a vast lake. Water of an unknown depth is beneath us. Overhead is a vaulted dome of great height, probably the hollowed interior of a mountain; on all sides are massive and perpendicular walls of rock, impregnable and insurmountable.

"The lake is undoubtedly ten miles or more in circumference, and, as you know too well, there is no surface outlet. There is an entrance, but we can no more force our way back through that entrance than we could swim up through the Falls of Niagara or ride the Nile Cataracts in a Rob Roy canoe. As long as our provisions last we shall live. When we no longer have anything to eat we shall die, and the next explorer who enters this lake will find our bones mingled with those lying behind us."

"And what will *he* do?" asked Guý.

"Perish like those before him," said the colonel. "This death trap caught many a victim and will catch many more. The light of day will never pierce this gloom."

The colonel spoke as though he were demonstrating a problem in Euclid or laying down plans for a campaign.

"I don't call myself a philosopher," he went on, "nor am I a fatalist, but I think that most men can face the inevitable with a certain calmness that is only born of absolute despair. Did you ever see a man hanged? I did once. He walked to the gallows as coolly and deliberately as though he were going to breakfast. A week before he had been defiant, blustering, terror stricken, and trembling, in a breath.

"When he realized that he had absolutely no loophole of escape, he faced the inevitable with steady nerves. When you realize your position fully, you will be like that man. You will accept your fate."

CHAPTER XXVIII.—A DESPERATE FIGHT.

THE colonel rose, and going down to the canoe helped himself to a handful of crackers and some figs. He came back to his seat and began to munch them very contentedly.

"The most merciful thing we could do would be to cast our provisions into the lake," he said finally. "It would cut short the agony of waiting, but I don't suppose you would look at it in that way."

"No, no; don't do that," cried Clutney. "Who knows what may happen yet?"

"Ah! there you are again," said the colonel; "still clinging to hope of life; still unable to realize the truth. You are only making it so much the harder for yourself."

"But there is surely some outlet to this vast body of water?" said Melton.

"Yes," was the colonel's reply. "Undoubtedly, but it must be at the bottom of the lake; it certainly is not on the surface. Do you suppose those poor savages would have perished here if an outlet had existed? They, too, must have been carried by accident into the wrong channel, and no doubt they circumnavigated the lake, as we have done. Realizing that they were lost, they either slew themselves to end their sufferings or they fell victims to the serpents without much resistance."

While Melton and the colonel were carrying on this conversation, Guy rose and went down to the water, with the intention of gathering some food, for he, too, was hungry.

The canoe was pulled partly on shore, and as it leaked a little the water had all collected in the stern, where Sir Arthur still lay in merciful sleep, thus wetting the rugs.

Guy noticed this, and with a view to making the sleeper a little more comfortable, he slid the canoe down until it lay flat in the water. It still retained a slight hold of an inch or two on the sand.

A sudden cry from the Greek brought him back in a hurry to the top of the island.

His companions were staring out on the lake, and Canaris was pointing with a trembling hand at some unseen object.

"What is the matter?" cried Guy. "What do you see?"

"Hush," said the colonel, holding up a warning finger. "Something is moving out on the lake. Do you hear it splashing in the water?"

As yet nothing could be seen, but the noise was very plain and distinct, a steady swish! swish! not unlike the beating of a little steamer.

A chilling fear grew on them as they listened to this strange, mysterious sound.

"Whatever it is, it is moving in a circle round the island," said Guy, "and keeping an equal distance from the shore."

"You are right, Chutney," said the colonel, after a pause. "The sound was on our left a moment ago. Now it is on our right."

The Greek was correct. The surface of the lake was violently agitated, though not a breath of air was stirring, and a steady flow of ripples was breaking on the sandy beach like tiny ocean waves.

The unknown navigator, whoever it was, had nearly completed the circuit of the island now, and was very near the spot where they had first heard it.

"It must be a serpent," cried Guy. "Heaven grant that it doesn't approach the island."

He hurriedly picked up the torch and ran with it to the shore. The radius of light thus thrown over the water illumined a space twenty yards ahead, and revealed a long, dark object moving in graceful undulations over the surface. It was beyond doubt a huge serpent, and as though angered by the light, the monster suddenly changed its course, and with a terrific splash headed directly for the shore. The huge head was in plain view, and the eyes flashed back fire from the reflected glare of the torch.

For an instant all seemed paralyzed with horror, and no one moved.

Chutney was the first to recover himself.

"We must kill him before he reaches the island," he cried, staggering back a pace or two. "Get the guns. Quick! quick! or it will be too late!"

He turned to flee across the island toward the canoe, but as he gained the ridge a cry of horror broke from his lips, and as his companions hurriedly reached the spot a single glance showed them what was the matter.

The canoe was no longer on the shore. The swell caused by the approach of the serpent had washed it from its slight support, and now it was twenty yards distant, and drifting farther and farther away with every second.

"The guns! The guns!" shrieked Chutney. "They are all in the boat. We are left at the mercy of the serpent. Sir Arthur! Sir Arthur!" he shouted with all his might, but no response came from the sleeping man, and the canoe continued to recede into the gloom.

At this terrible moment it was Forbes who brought a ray of hope into their despair.

Springing forward he snatched up an armful of the native weapons, spears, and axes, and distributed them to his companions.

"We must fight the monster with these," he cried; "and while we are keeping him off, you, Canaris, run to the shore and keep on shouting to Sir Arthur. He may wake and get here in time to save us yet."

"He must be in a faint," exclaimed the colonel, "or the noise would surely have wakened him. Come on, Chutney, the serpent is half way to the shore. We may keep him off with these arms."

The torch was hastily placed in the sand near the water's edge, and grasping their weapons firmly, they prepared to check the advance of the monster. Fortunately the spears and axes were of hard iron and fitted with strong handles which the long confinement in the cavern seemed to have toughened.

Meanwhile the air echoed with the Greek's loud cries, but at that moment none thought of Sir Arthur or of the canoe, for the serpent was within half a dozen yards of the island and his great body was undulating through the water for thirty feet behind him.

"Keep cool," said Chutney. "Aim well for the head and make every stroke tell."

The sight of the glaring eyes and the blood red fangs was enough to appal the stoutest heart. They shrank back in uncontrollable fear, as the long neck suddenly rose four feet in air and the body sank under the water.

The monster uttered an angry hiss, but before he could spring Forbes cast a spear with all his might, and the sharp point pierced the serpent's body a foot below the head.

"Back for your lives," he cried, and as they darted up the island the monster uttered a fearful sound, part hiss, part bellow, and flung half his length in contortions on the sand.

Guy sprang forward and launched another spear that entered the slimy body near the center, but neither wound was mortal and the great serpent came on unchecked.

In one respect they had the advantage of him, as Guy accidentally discovered, for the wicked eyes blinked in the torchlight and the monster's actions showed that his powers of sight were limited to darkness.

He was wonderfully quick and agile, however, for a sudden convulsive leap carried him almost to the feet of his antagonists, and again they scattered in alarm.

The serpent's whole body was now on shore, with the exception of the tail, which was lashing the water to a milky foam.

Seizing another spear Guy circled to one side, and boldly approaching the trembling coils, with one terrific blow he planted his weapon into the serpent's body so deeply that the spear pinned the monster firmly to the ground.

A cry of horror burst from his companions as the huge head swung round with awful quickness, but Guy missed it by barely an inch as he sprang aside.

The serpent's contortions were now frightful to see, as he squirmed and twisted to tear loose from the weapon. "Now let him have it," cried Guy; and in an instant the remaining spears, half a dozen in number, were driven deeply into the venomous coils.

The struggle was now at its crisis. With axes in hand they were dodging about the writhing monster, seeking a chance to reach the head, when an awful shriek echoed through the cavern, apparently from some distance out on the lake, and then the Greek's voice was raised in a loud and urgent appeal for help. What new disaster threatened?

CHAPTER XXIX.—GUY SAVES SIR ARTHUR.

THIS new alarm, coming just at the uncertain period of their struggle, was quite enough to strike despair to the hearts of all.

"That was Sir Arthur's voice we heard first," exclaimed Forbes. "And it is Canaris who is shouting for help. What are we going to do about it?"

"Tell him to hold out for a moment," cried Guy. "I'll wind up this affair pretty quick."

Raising the axe, he made a sudden dart forward and buried the blade deep in the serpent's head. It was a clever stroke and so forcible that the axe was jerked from his hand.

The colonel dragged him hastily back, but the danger was over. The monster was threshing the blood stained sand in his death agonies, powerless to do further harm.

Canaris was still calling for help, and, leaving their dying antagonist, the others plunged across the island. The Greek was running up and down the strip of sand, and far out on the lake the canoe was visible in the radius of light, with Sir Arthur standing erect in the bow.

"He won't take the paddle!" exclaimed Canaris. "He says there is something splashing in the lake beyond him. He's a dead man if he doesn't get back to the island."

"Sir Arthur," shouted the colonel, "come back; paddle for your life. Do you hear me?"

The only response was a cry of fright. Sir Arthur was plainly too dazed to be capable of action. He had just wakened, and the horror of his situation was too much for him.

"Save me! save me!" he cried. "The serpent is coming; I can hear it splashing the water."

"Take the paddle," shouted Guy, "and steer for the island. If you don't you are lost."

This seemed to arouse the imperiled man to action. He snatched up a paddle, and, dropping to his knees, drove the canoe forward with frantic strokes.

His companions encouraged him with cheering words as he came nearer. The island was barely twenty yards distant when the paddle slipped from his grasp. He turned round, apparently to pick up another, and then threw himself with a dismal cry to the bottom of the canoe.

The cause of his new and sudden fright was readily seen. On the edge of the gloom, not many yards beyond the canoe, a violent agitation of the water was visible. There undoubtedly was another large serpent in pursuit, and at that moment it looked very much as though Sir Arthur was doomed.

In spite of all the frantic shouts and directions of his friends he continued to utter piteous appeals for help from the bottom of the canoe. When at length he *did* recover enough self control to take hold of another paddle, the serpent's head and body were actually plain in sight, approaching at a rapid speed.

Not only was Sir Arthur's life now at stake, but, in addition, guns, canoe, and all would be lost, thus leaving the rest of the party unarmed on the island, at the mercy of the ravenous serpents who appeared to swarm in the lake.

One of those sudden impulses common to his nature now flashed into Guy's mind, and, without giving himself a second for deliberation, he flung off jacket and shoes, and before any one could raise a hand to restrain him, dived headforemost into the lake.

He came to the surface within ten yards of the canoe, which was making but feeble progress under Sir Arthur's erratic strokes.

Swimming hand over hand, Guy reached the bow and quickly drew himself over the side, just as the pursuing serpent came within seven or eight yards of the stern of the canoe.

His original intention to paddle for the island was instantly abandoned. Bidding Sir Arthur work lustily, he snatched up his rifle and took a careful aim at the approaching monster, who was snorting and hissing in a truly frightful manner.

The sharp report came at once, producing a thousand echoes through the hollow vault of the cavern, and under cover of the drifting smoke, which for the moment concealed the result of the shot, Guy sprang to Sir Arthur's aid with another paddle.

Half a dozen of his powerful strokes brought the canoe within a yard of the shore. A terrific splashing in his rear, as well as the loud shouts of his friends, warned Guy of the imminence of the danger.

Fairly pushing Sir Arthur out of the canoe into the water, waist deep, he tossed the provisions far out on the island, caught up the guns, and made a frantic leap. He landed on the edge of the sand, and was instantly caught by eager arms, and pulled far up the beach. He turned, to realize with a shudder the narrowness of his escape.

Made furious by the bullet hole which Guy had put in his spotted skin, the monster threw himself on the abandoned canoe, which they had been unable to save, and with a sickening crunch it was shivered to a shapeless mass of fragments, under the pressure of the mighty coils. Then, as the serpent flung himself on shore, they realized that it was time to act. A blazing torch in the Greek's hand lit up the scene as Guy cocked his rifle and awaited an opportunity for a shot.

It was not slow in coming. As the long neck and head darted forward, Guy fired, and the bullet tore its way through the reptile's throat.

There was no necessity for a second shot. The death agony began right there, and in its convulsive throes the serpent flung himself back into the water, and with a final quiver disappeared in the depths of the lake, leaving a trail of blood on the silvery white sand behind him.

With expressions of gratitude for their escape, all hurried down to the broken canoe.

"A hundred men could never put this together again," said Guy, as he pulled a couple of floating fragments from the water.

The torches and rugs were easily procured, and laid away to dry, but the lamp and the oil cask could not be found. They were probably at the bottom, but no one cared to dive after them.

"That was the closest shave I ever saw," said the colonel. "I gave you both up for lost, and as for that daring act of yours, Chutney, I cannot find words to express my admiration. You saved Sir Arthur's life."

Guy modestly made no reply. He calmly pulled on his jacket and shoes, and suggested that they cross the island and take a look at the other serpent.

The reptile was found to be quite dead, and little wonder, after all the spears that had entered his coils. As near as they could judge, he was between thirty and forty feet long, with a body as thick as a small keg. The skin was repulsive and slimy, of a dirty green color.

"It's a regular sea serpent," said Melton. "What a sensation a monster of this kind would make if he was put on exhibition at the Zoo."

"And the other one was fully as large," added Guy. "That makes no less than four we have already encountered. There must be a great many in the river and lake."

One glimpse of the creature sickened Sir Arthur. He turned away and sat down on the edge of the raft.

Up to this moment the excitement had banished all else from their minds. They had fought a desperate fight for life and conquered. At the very flush of their success the shadow of certain death returned, blacker and more forbidding than ever, and in a moment their triumphant feelings were changed to deepest melancholy.

A short time before, under the influence of the colonel's philosophical words, they had felt in some manner resigned to a fate that nothing could avert. Now it was ten times more horrible and loathsome to contemplate, ten times harder to realize.

Absurd as it seemed, fresh hope sprang up in their hearts, and they tried to reason themselves into the belief that some unlooked for chance of escape would offer itself yet.

Even the colonel's mood had changed, and it was easy to see that he was struggling with some terrible emotion.

The desire for life that was strong within him suggested to Guy a new plan; nothing, indeed, that offered any hope of escape, but merely a solution to his curiosity.

He remembered that on each occasion when their canoe had been caught by the influx of the river it had been carried direct to this island, a fact

which seemed to prove the existence of a sluggish current through the center of the lake.

Did this current continue on past the island, and if so, whither did it lead?

A solution to these two problems Guy was curious to obtain.

It served to occupy his mind, to keep his thoughts from dwelling on the horrible fate that was in store for him.

It was more than likely, he told himself, that whirlpools would be found in the center of the lake. Well, drowning would be an easy death compared to the lingering tortures of starvation.

CHAPTER XXX.—A STRANGE DISCOVERY.

GUY's explanation of his intentions was received without comment. Presently the colonel said, "You forget that we no longer have a canoe, Chutney. We are prisoners on this island."

"But we have a raft," replied Guy, "and a good one, too. It would be much more convenient and comfortable to travel on."

"Suppose we try it," said Forbes. "Anything to get away from this place."

"We can't get into a worse hole, that's true," added the colonel. "I believe you are right about the current, Chutney, though it can only land us on the edge of some whirlpool."

Sir Arthur was as eager as the rest to get away. He had passed through so many horrors, he said, that he had become accustomed to them, and it mattered little what the future held in store for him. The raft was dug out from the sand and found to be in perfect condition. It was fastened together with twisted withes of some flexible wood. It was no easy task to get it into the water, but by all working together, and using the guns and paddles as levers, it was finally pushed into the lake and floated lightly on the surface.

The rugs, provisions, and what torches remained were carried on board, and with a final look round the island to see that nothing of importance had been forgotten, they quietly embarked, and Guy, with a shove of the paddle, sent the raft out on the lake. The object of the journey they hardly knew themselves. They were leaving behind them a spot associated with dreaded memories, and that was all they cared to know.

"Don't do that," said Guy, as Canaris picked up a paddle and began to use it vigorously. "We must drift entirely with the current."

The torch was placed securely in a crevice of the logs, and in a very short time it was proved beyond a doubt that some current did exist. The island faded slowly from view.

Still reluctant to face their situation they grouped together and discussed various things. The Greek gave a long account of his curious wanderings and adventures. Guy and Melton spoke of their thrilling experiences in Burma only the previous year, and Colonel Carrington entertained them with the tale of his participation in the bombardment of Alexandria in '82.

So the hours passed on, and still they chatted of the outside world, for-

getting for the moment the hopelessness of their present situation, the living tomb that had cut them off forever from the light of day.

"This reminds me of something I read a few months ago," said Sir Arthur, who was facing the situation with surprising calmness. "Some person mailed me from London *Blackwood's Monthly* containing an instalment of a story by the fellow who wrote that deucedly clever book, 'King Solomon's Wives.' Ah! what was the name now—aw, yes, Haggard—Rider Haggard——"

"Beg pardon, Sir Arthur," interrupted the colonel, "but the title was 'King Solomon's Mines,' not his wives."

"Aw, that so, Carrington? Very well; doesn't make much difference. However, the hero of the story was traveling, as we are, on a lake, only it was in the open air, and the outlet was slightly beneath the surface. The water ran under a high wall of rock, and sucked the poor fellows and the canoe under. It would be funny if this lake had the same sort of an arrangement."

"Well, it hasn't," replied the colonel. "We went all around the walls in a canoe, and if any such place as that had been in existence we would not be here now, that's all."

"No, I suppose not," said Sir Arthur. "I'm going to take a nap. Wake me if anything turns up, will you?" And making a pillow of one of the rugs, he was soon snoring vociferously.

"It will be a mercy if he never wakes," said Chutney in a husky voice. "Not much danger of that, however. We have food enough to last us a couple of weeks yet, and unless we take your suggestion, colonel, and toss it into the lake, we are good for that length of time, I suppose."

"Yes," rejoined the colonel, "unless we get sucked into a whirlpool or the serpents attack the raft in force."

After that nothing was said for an hour or more. Their fate stared them in the face with all its awful realism.

But even under these circumstances they grew drowsy, and dropped off one by one among the rugs, except Guy, who declared his intention to stay awake and be on the lookout for any danger that might threaten.

His was a solemn and lonely vigil. He envied his companions their power to sleep, as the canoe drifted on through the gloom. The torch burned slowly out, and he replaced it with a fresh one. His loaded rifle lay within reach, but nothing happened to arouse his fear.

Sad and bitter were the reflections that surged into his mind. As the events of his life rose up before him with wonderful clearness time passed unheeded, and at last his brain grew weary, and rolling over on the rugs he fell instantly into a deep slumber.

Strangely enough he was the first to awake. He had slept a long while, he saw at a glance, for the torch was burnt almost to a cinder. The rest were still sleeping.

"We must have been drifting for at least twelve hours," he said half aloud. "We should be across the lake by this time."

He picked up a fresh torch and lit it from the expiring flame of the other.

As he stuck it in the crevice the glare suddenly revealed a wall of rock a few yards distant, and in a very short time the raft struck the shore with a harsh rattle that proved the impulse of the current beyond a doubt.

The concussion failed to rouse the sleepers, and Guy was hesitating whether he ought to do so or not when a faint sound came indistinctly to his ear.

At first he could scarcely believe the evidence of his own senses. He fancied it must be a delusion, a buzzing in his ears. The strangest part of it was that the sound actually resembled running water.

He listened a while longer, and then quietly woke the Greek, who sat up, rubbing his eyes.

"Canaris," he whispered, "do you hear anything?"

An interval of silence followed, inexpressibly painful to Guy, and then the Greek cried excitedly, "Yes, I hear running water. It comes from the other side of the cliff."

"Then I am not mistaken," was Guy's joyful exclamation. "We both hear it. It can be no delusion."

Then his heart sank as he thought of the wall of rock before them.

"It is the outlet of the river," he said bitterly, "only a few yards distant, and it might as well be a thousand miles."

Remembering what Sir Arthur had told them, he looked anxiously at the surface of the lake, but the water was calm and quiet, and the raft hung motionless.

"The outlet is far beneath the surface," said Canaris. "You can tell that by the sound. If it were near the top we would be instantly sucked under."

Impelled by an irresistible impulse Guy seized the torch and held it above his head.

"Look! Look!" he cried, in a voice that trembled with excitement. "The cliff slants at an angle. There are crevices to hold one's hands and feet. Make no noise, Canaris; don't wake the rest, but help me to reach that ledge yonder and I will see where this leads."

The cliff slanted indeed, but at an almost imperceptible angle. The raft tilted slightly as Canaris pushed Guy up the face of the rock, but the latter succeeded in reaching a small ledge six feet above the water.

"All right," he whispered. "I can see plenty of places to catch hold of beyond me. Now fasten a torch to one of the paddles, Canaris, and hold it as high as you can."

This was a clever suggestion. The Greek fortunately had a bit of cord about him, and in a moment the torch was throwing a dull light far up the rugged slope of the rock.

Guy continued to climb higher and higher, keeping a cool head in spite of his excitement, and testing well each crevice or projecting ledge before trusting his weight to it, and at last, with a throb of joy that nearly took his strength away, he pulled himself out upon the flat summit of the rock.

Seventy feet below him was the raft and its occupants, glowing in the torchlight. Guy crawled forward on his hands and knees, and soon reached

the verge of the rock on the other side. The running water was below him, much farther, indeed, than the level of the lake, but the roar of the torrent was loud and distinct to the ear.

He turned and crawled back.

"Canaris," he whispered down, "I have reached the top of the cliff. There is running water on the other side. Waken the rest as quickly as possible, and send some one up with a torch. I forgot to bring one with me."

CHAPTER XXXI.—A TERRIBLE BLUNDER.

FROM his gloomy perch on top of the rock Guy could see all that happened plainly.

Canaris woke his companions as speedily as possible. Their astonishment at finding Guy missing was very great, and at first they seemed scarcely able to comprehend the Greek's explanation.

Then they glanced eagerly overhead, and hailed Guy with shouts of joy.

"Here, hoist me up," cried the colonel. "I'll take him up the torch."

"No, I'll go!" exclaimed Forbes. "I'm a pretty expert climber, colonel, and won't run any risk."

"Bless me!" ejaculated Sir Arthur. "Did that young man Chutney walk up the face of that wall? Why, he's a freak."

Canaris solved the matter by picking up one of the leathern bags and tearing it open.

"Look!" he shouted up to Guy. "It was fortunate we kept these. Here are the ropes and hooks by which we scaled the walls of Harar."

"Hurrah!" cried Chutney. "Just the thing! I had forgotten about them."

"Now," continued the Greek, "both of you can go up the rock, and I will remain here with Sir Arthur."

He dragged out the four ropes, spliced two of them together to make the required length, and then, giving the end to Forbes to hold, he threw the iron hook skilfully toward Guy. It landed on top of the cliff, and Guy fastened it securely to a crevice.

"Now you can come up," he shouted down.

Placing a torch in each pocket, Forbes began the ascent, and speedily reached the top. The colonel followed with equal dexterity.

"All right?" called the Greek.

"Yes," replied Chutney; "all right. We will return as soon as possible. If anything happens fire your gun."

Guy lit a torch, and the glare revealed only the narrow ledge on which they stood. Beneath and overhead was empty space.

They paused a moment to listen to the sound of the running water.

"It is far beneath us," said the colonel; "possibly a hundred feet, but it is the outlet of the lake, I am sure. Upon my word, Chutney, I believe we will get out of this scrape yet."

"Come on," said Guy briefly; and he led the way along the narrow path.

They traveled in silence for five minutes, until the light from the raft had

nearly vanished, and then Guy halted suddenly. A wall of rock, steep and smooth, prevented further advance.

"Come, let us go back," he said; and they retraced their steps until they were near the starting point.

Under foot were loose fragments of stone. Guy picked up one of these and tossed it over the edge. A faint splash was distinctly heard a few seconds later.

"The river is directly beneath us," said the colonel.

He picked up another stone, and moving off a few yards, cast it down. This time it struck something hard after the same interval.

"There must be a shore to the river," he said. "What shall we do now? Follow the top of the cliff in the other direction?"

"No," said Guy. "We must scale the precipice right here."

"Impossible!" declared Forbes. "Our ropes are not long enough."

"Canaris has two more," replied Guy; "go and get them."

Melton hurried off at once.

The raft was close at hand, and in five minutes he was back.

"Here are the ropes," he said. "Canaris tied them together and tossed up one end."

Guy skilfully made one continuous rope about eighty feet long. In breathless silence he let the hook drop over the edge, paying out the line yard by yard.

Seventy five feet from the top the strain slackened.

"It has reached the bottom," cried Guy joyfully.

"We had better make sure," said Forbes. "Haul up the rope again."

As the hook came over the top Melton grasped it.

"Are the ropes tied strongly?" he asked.

"Yes, it won't part," replied Guy.

"All right, then. Hold the end tightly. Here goes."

He flung the hook far into the air, and the next instant Guy felt a sharp jerk.

"The hook is swinging in air," he cried in wonder.

"I was right," said Melton; "that was only a ledge it struck before. The bottom may be a hundred feet or more distant."

Guy hurriedly pulled the rope back and fastened the hook to the top of the cliff. He made a noose in the other end and placed it under his shoulders.

"Now let me down," he said coolly. "If I miss the ledge you can haul me up again."

No one made any objections.

It was perilous, of course, but some one had to do it, and why not Chutney?

They lowered him into the darkness foot by foot, and at last the strain slackened.

"All right," came the welcome cry from below. "I'm on the ledge. It's two or three feet wide. Now come down hand over hand, one of you."

"I'll go," said Forbes. "You will have to remain here, colonel, to help us again."

Meanwhile Guy had lit a torch, and when Melton began the descent the yellow glare was visible far below.

The face of the cliff, though sheer, was full of rough projections for his feet, and in a short time he stood beside Chutney on the ledge.

Wrapping the end of the rope about his arm, Guy called loudly, "Throw the hook far into the air, colonel. Do you understand?"

"All right," was the immediate response, and in a moment, as the rope swung over their heads, a heavy sound was heard beneath.

"It reaches the bottom," cried Guy joyfully. "The rope is slack."

He hauled on it eagerly, until ten yards or more lay in coils at his feet. Then it became taut. The bottom of the cliff was fifty feet below.

The roar of the water was now loud and fierce, but it lay more to one side. Directly beneath them was solid ground.

With a trembling hand Guy pulled at the hook and secured it to the ledge. Claiming the right to go first, he let himself over the verge, and a joyful hail announced that he had reached the bottom in safety.

Melton stuck his torch in a crevice of the rock and started after him. As his feet touched the ground Guy lit a fresh torch and the light revealed a level space of white sand, strewn with rocks.

Overhead was the glow of Melton's torch on the ledge, and far beyond on the dizzy summit of the cliff twinkled the light that the colonel held.

"We are on the bottom," shouted Guy, with all his might.

His voice echoed again and again through the cavern. A reply came back, but it was almost lost in the roar of the unseen waters.

With feelings that it would be difficult to describe they now advanced along the sand, bearing the torches high over their heads.

With each step the sound grew louder. It was not the harsh, spasmodic roar of water dashing among sunken rocks, but resembled rather the swift outpour of a torrent gliding over a smooth, unbroken bed.

"Here we are," cried Chutney. "I nearly stepped in the water without seeing it."

He held his torch out with one hand, and its glowing radius revealed a strange sight.

Twenty yards to their left a rapid, unbroken sheet of water burst with terrific force from a dark archway in the very face of the smooth cliff. It was the outlet to the lake.

In width it was about forty feet, though the opposite side of the river was shrouded in darkness. On the spot where they stood a reflux current had worn an inlet into the sandy shore, and here a stretch of comparatively calm water was circling in swirling eddies, a startling contrast to the furious sweep of the torrent beyond.

Yes, there was no doubt of it, here was the continuation of the underground river, the way that led to safety and hope.

With strange emotions they watched in silence the dark flood pouring from its natural archway in the face of the cliff. To their right the sandy

shore seemed to spread away smoothly into darkness, but before they could scrutinize their surroundings more closely a strange, sharp sound echoed through the vaulted roof of the vast cavern; succeeded by a faint shout.

"It was the report of the Greek's rifle," exclaimed Melton, in horror stricken tones, "and it was Carrington who shouted. Some calamity has happened."

Staggering with fear, they hastened back to the edge of the cliff. Melton clutched the dangling rope.

"Stop!" cried Guy, in tones of agony. "My heavens, Melton, we are lost, doomed to the most horrible of deaths. What blind, desperate fools we were. We can never get back to the lake, and our companions can never reach us here. We could not be more widely separated were the world itself rolling between us."

"What do you mean?" cried Forbes. "Are you mad, Chutney?"

"Mad? No. I wish I was. You are blind, Melton. *How can we get that rope up the seventy feet stretch from the ledge to the summit of the cliff?*"

William Murray Graydon.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

HER MIRROR.

OF all the dainty trinkets
 On Betty's boudoir shelf,
 There's one of glass—I think it's
 A sort of second self;
 For once, when for a minute
 I gazed in it alone,
 I saw a face within it,
 And it was Betty's own.
 Some magic, necromancy,
 Describe it as you deem;
 A sentimental fancy,
 Or fantasy of dream;
 'Twas there, and fresh and pretty
 As any face could be,
 And I—well, I know Betty,
 That's proof enough for me!
 I wish I might discover
 By some such wizard art
 The face of Betty's lover,
 And satisfy my heart;
 If I could get that mirror,
 What better could I do?
 What queer is might be queerer—
 I might get Betty too!

Felix Carmen.

THE BUNKEL MYSTERY.*

How the robbery of the rival banks became a matter of strange coincidences—Far reaching and totally unexpected results of an act of gallantry—The battles on Bunkel Island, and the frustrating of carefully laid plans.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

MR. SINGERLAY and Mr. Barkpool are the two wealthiest citizens of Montoban. The former is proprietor of the Montoban Mill, and president of the Montoban Bank; the latter owns the Onongo Mill, and presides over the Onongo Bank. They have long been enemies, and their quarrel is shared by their sons, Dolph Singerlay and Phin Barkpool, but both the latter are beset by the same desire: to have a steamer of their own on the lake. Andy Lamb is the son of Mr. Barkpool's engineer, and he rescues Diana Singerlay from the persecutions of Tom Sawder, a young hoodlum. Phin quarrels with him in consequence, and the father is dismissed from the Barkpool employ, only to be hired by Mr. Singerlay. Meantime Dolph and Phin, despairing of getting steamers from their fathers, take the money from the banks of which their fathers are the respective heads. They are surprised in their work by a professional burglar, called Poddy, and his assistant, Tom Sawder, who capture the two young gentlemen, together with a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and carry them off in a rowboat to Bunkel Island in Lake Montoban. Here they are kept in a grotto, effectually concealed from view, while Montoban supposes that the two banks have been robbed by the sons of their respective presidents. Andy Lamb, however, has his doubts on this point, and he tells Rynon, an officer who has been put on the case, about a strange man he has seen on Bunkel Island. Although Rynon declares that this is no trail, Mr. Singerlay insists that the island shall be visited, which is done, with no apparent result. Andy, however, remains behind to explore further, and finally falls in with Dolph and Phin, who explain to him the true state of affairs. Meantime a gale has arisen, and Andy dares not cross the lake in the small boat he has retained. Dolph and Phin return to Poddy's cave, fearful lest they be missed, while Andy runs his boat into a little water cavern, where he overhears Poddy talking to Tom Sawder, and presently is amazed to find a heavy satchel let down through an opening in the rocks over his head until it rests on a ledge by his side. Andy's heart bounds as he realizes it must contain the money of which the two banks have been rifled.

CHAPTER XXXII.—RELIEF FROM AN UNEXPECTED QUARTER.

ANDY LAMB was more excited than he had ever been before in his life. Dolph had told him during the interview at the foot of the hill that the money was contained in a traveling bag. He felt it all over with the greatest care; and he could hear his heart thump against his ribs as he did so. Was it possible that the money stolen from the banks was within his grasp? It seemed to be altogether incredible.

At the bottom of the bag he could feel some hard and unyielding substances. These must be the instruments used in Poddy's villainous trade. All the rest of the bag was soft and pliable, and he was sure the remaining space was stuffed full of bank bills.

As he continued to listen Andy heard other sounds in the upper grotto, like the slam of boards on a rock. He concluded that the robber was cover-

**This story began in the April issue of THE ARGOSY. The five back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 50 cents.*

ing the opening with the boards which Tom Sawder had contributed to the enterprise. After he had waited some time, he was confident that the villain had left the bag for the time, and he thought he would venture to light another match.

By the aid of this light he saw the bag. A cord was attached to it, not simply to the handles, but several half hitches were passed around it, and rigged so that the bearing came on one end. This was doubtless done so that the bag should descend endwise, and thus encounter fewer impediments in its downward passage.

It had come down safely, and rested on the platform. The other end of the line must have been concealed near the top of the shaft.

Andy had only the privilege of guessing why Poddy had made this disposition of the booty. Probably he distrusted his companions, and thought it advisable to put the money out of their reach. He had taken pains to send Tom Sawder out of the grotto, as Andy had heard for himself, and this proved that the hoodlum had not secured the confidence of his employer.

Suddenly Andy's blood was chilled, and he started up from his seat in the boat. What if the robber should change his mind and suspect that his treasure was not safe where he had deposited it? What if he should conclude to bury it? What if any unexpected movement in Montoban or any other event should compel him to recover the bag?

Andy was appalled at the thought, and he decided to put it out of the power of Poddy to reclaim the bag. But it was hardly safe to do so. The possessor of so vast a sum of money was likely to pull the cord a dozen times a day to assure himself that the bag was still where he had placed it.

Yet at any risk Andy felt that he could not leave the treasure subject to the caprice of the robber. He worked for half an hour untying the fastenings of the bag, for Poddy had done his work in the most thorough manner, though his knots were not nautically correct. But the cord was removed, and the bag placed in the bottom of the boat.

Poddy was sure to handle that line many times, and at the first pull he would realize that the treasure was gone. Then he would descend the shaft himself, if there was space enough to permit him to do so. He was sure to work for a week or a month till he discovered what had become of the bag.

Andy saw that he could not perfectly protect himself in the face of such a contingency, but he could do something to remove the peril farther away from him.

He lifted the bag several times, and obtained the best idea he could of its weight. Then from the loose rocks on the platform he selected one of about the same number of pounds. To this he attached the cord securely, and left it where the bag had been. This would answer for Poddy to experiment upon quite as well as the bag full of bank notes.

Having done all he could do to fortify his position as custodian of the entire funds of two banks, Andy dropped into the seat in the stern of the tender. He was perfectly satisfied with himself and everybody else. He did not even find any mental fault with Poddy, who had certainly played into his hands in the most accommodating manner, though he had done it

without being conscious of what he was doing, and was not, therefore, entitled to any credit.

The only thing that troubled the machinist's son was the consciousness that his usual dinner time had passed without the observation of the customary services at this hour. More vulgarly, his stomach was grumbling for the want of his rations. He had eaten his breakfast at six o'clock, and it must be two by this time. But there was no restaurant at hand, and there was not the remotest possibility, so far as he had been able to reason it out, for him to get anything to eat before the gale subsided.

There was plenty of provisions in the upper grotto; and so there was in Montoban; and the food was as available in one place as in the other. With a hundred and fifty thousand dollars within his grasp, he was feeling the pangs of hunger.

While he was lamenting the necessity of submitting to the growlings of his empty stomach for an indefinite period, his attention was attracted by a series of new and unfamiliar sounds. But they did not come from the cave above, and they did not excite his fears, only his curiosity. The noises entered the cave through the main entrance, and came from the lake.

Andy listened to the sounds for some time without being able to define them. They were like the puffings of a steam engine. Anywhere else he would have said that a steamer was approaching Bunkel Island, for the sound came nearer every moment. There was no steamer on Lake Montoban, and of course the noise could not come from one. This point was settled decisively in the mind of the listener.

He felt that he was then in charge of mighty interests, and that he ought to know what was coming, if anything.

Moved by this reflection, he cast off the line at the side, and with it tied the treasure to the bottom of the boat, so that if by any unforeseen accident the tender was upset, the bag would not be carried to the bottom by the weight of the tools in it. Drawing the boat to the mouth of the cave, he obtained a view of the lake in the direction of the channel.

It certainly was a day of surprises, and there seemed to be no end of them. In spite of his faith in the fact that there was no steamer on Lake Montoban, one was coming up the channel. She was a craft of considerable size, with a saloon deck and cabin above the main deck.

Andy was quite as thoroughly surprised and confounded as he had been at any time before that day, except when the treasure of the two banks dropped within his grasp.

When he came to look the strange craft over in detail, after a general view which did not take in particulars, he saw the word "Lily" in large gilt letters on the front of the pilot house.

The name explained to him that it was the steamer from Lake Modogo, which the owner was trying to sell. Some said she could not get over the shoal at the foot of the lake, where it flowed into the Bondego River. There she was, and in some way she had come into Lake Montoban.

The gale had been increasing in force all the time since Andy retired to the cave, and the lake was in a state of terrible commotion. The Lily was

pitching and dancing on the waves, though she seemed to Andy to be going only at half speed, even with the wind astern of her. She was a screw vessel, and she rolled a good deal, as well as pitched.

Andy shook his handkerchief at her, and at the risk of being heard by the robbers, he shouted for her to take him on board. To his great satisfaction she headed towards the cave, and soon stopped her propeller.

"Is there water enough there?" called the man in the pilot house.

"Twenty feet and more," replied Andy.

The steamer came near enough to the rocks to smooth the water between the tender and her hull, and Andy pulled out to her. When he came alongside he untied the bag and passed it to the engineer, who had come to his assistance. Together they hauled the tender on deck.

"Do you know Lake Montoban?" asked the engineer when they had secured the boat.

"Every foot of it," replied Andy confidently.

"Captain Boscook wants a pilot, for he don't know this lake," said the engineer.

Andy, with the bag in his hand, went up to see the captain.

CHAPTER XXXIII.—CAPTAIN BOSCOOK IN A BAD SCRAPE.

THE captain of the steamer rang the bell to go ahead as soon as Andy was on deck, as she had begun to drift rather too near the rocks for the repose of his nerves. The water was deep enough for her close to the shore, and she was in no danger.

"Who in creation's name are you?" demanded Captain Boscook, as the bearer of the big bag entered the pilot house.

"My name is Andy Lamb. I could not get off the island in the little craft I have with me, for it would have been swamped in the first big wave that struck it," replied Andy, as he looked squarely into the face of the commander of the Lily, who was also her sole owner.

Andy had seen him before in Montoban, though the owner had not applied to him to purchase the steamer. His gaze was not returned, and the captain had hardly looked at him when he came into the pilot house. The passenger saw that he was very nervous and uneasy. The engineer had told Andy that the captain wanted a pilot, and he might have put it in much stronger terms, and said that Captain Boscook was well nigh scared out of his wits by the storm and the unknown perils of the navigation.

He looked as though he expected his beautiful steamer would be split in twain the next moment by some hidden rock. He had fixed his gaze upon the white capped waves ahead of him, and he seemed to be afraid to remove it even for an instant.

"Do you know anything about this lake?" asked the captain, in very shaky tones.

"I know all about it," replied Andy.

"Do you know where the rocks are?"

"Every one of them; I have sailed over every foot of water in Lake

Montoban a great many times. I know how far it is from the bottom to the top wherever you put me on this pond," replied Andy, rather exaggerating his knowledge and going considerably beyond the literal truth, though he was really the most competent pilot on the lake.

"Then you are just the fellow for me!" exclaimed Captain Boscook, looking at his passenger almost for the first time. "I thought you might know something about the lake or I should not have dared to stop for you."

"I have been sailing on Lake Montoban for the last two years, and I guess I ought to know something about it."

"At any rate, I guess you know more about it than I do," added the captain, with evident relief.

"Where are you bound?" asked Andy, though he had no doubt the boat was going to Montoban, as she was headed in that direction.

"What did you say your name was?" asked the captain, with a sudden stroke of energy, as though something had come to his mind.

"Lamb—Andrew Lamb; but everybody calls me Andy."

"Lamb! That's it! Then you are the son of the engineer of the Onongo Mill?" continued the captain.

"My father was the engineer of the Onongo, but he is now at work for the Montoban."

"Singerlay's son spoke to me about you, and said you could run the Lily if his father would let him buy her. I'm glad to see you, for I reckon I'm in a bad scrape," said Captain Boscook very anxiously.

"What sort of a scrape are you in?" inquired Andy, as he deposited the heavy traveling bag under the seat behind the wheel.

"I shouldn't think you would ask that question," said the captain, with a glance at the passenger, apparently to see if he was not making game of him.

"I don't know that I should be expected to know in what scrape you might happen to be," replied Andy, as he looked at the bag to make sure that it had not dropped through the bottom of the steamer into the deep water of the lake.

"Can't you see for yourself?" demanded Captain Boscook.

"I really don't see anything that looks like a scrape, and I think I can see all there is to be seen on board," answered Andy, looking all about him to ascertain if any part of the boat was stove or missing; but he could discover nothing.

"Don't you see the lake?" asked the captain impatiently, as though he thought his new companion must be very stupid.

"Of course I see it; and I think it is a remarkably fine sheet of water," said Andy, laughing in spite of himself. "I have never been on Lake Modogo, and it may be finer than Montoban, for aught I know."

"I guess you are trying to make fun of me," added the owner.

"Not at all, Captain Boscook!" protested Andy.

"I guess you never went on a steamer any," answered the captain.

"That's a bad guess, sir; my father used to be the engineer of a steamer on the Hudson. I used to go with him a good deal, and I have steered the

boat a great many miles, and had charge of the machine for hours at a time. Between trips the steamer sometimes made excursions out to sea, and I have steered when the water was decidedly rough. I think I know something about a steamer."

"I guess the boot is on t'other leg, then," added Captain Boscook, with the nearest approach to a smile that Andy had seen on his face. "I guess you know more about one than I do."

"I don't say that, sir."

"I guess you had better take this wheel, Andy Lamb," continued the captain.

"I will take the wheel if you say so," replied Andy, as the owner stepped aside for him to do so.

"You did not tell me where you were bound when I asked you," said the new pilot.

"I was going up to the south side of that island, and I meant to turn round there."

"Then you are not going to Montoban?" asked Andy, greatly disappointed; and he looked behind at the bag under the seat.

"I guess not!" exclaimed the owner. "Of course I'm not going to Montoban today!"

His tones were very decided on a very simple question, in which no great issue seemed to be involved; and the pilot could not see why the owner was so earnest about it. Of course he had a reason, for he had just said he was in a bad scrape.

"I am sure I don't understand you, Captain Boscook," said Andy, puzzled as much by the manner as by the words of his companion in the pilot house. "You said you were in a bad scrape, but you did not explain the nature of it."

"I should think you might see for yourself."

"I really can't see anything."

"Can't you see that I am caught out here in a bad storm?" demanded the owner almost angrily, and as though it had required a desperate effort for him to admit that he was frightened. "I was a fool to start when I did."

Andy wanted to laugh as he looked at the bag, but he did not care to jar the feelings of his companion who had been kind enough to take him on board, though he had done so in the hope of obtaining a pilot.

"Sparks, the engineer, said he wouldn't go with me at first, and I am sorry he did not stick to it," continued Captain Boscook. "He is a good deal more scared than I am, but both of us have got it bad."

"Why didn't you come about and return if you thought the weather was too bad for you?" asked Andy.

"I couldn't do it!" protested the timid owner.

"Why not?"

"Because I couldn't turn round. You see, I didn't know how bad it was till we got about three miles this side of Bushrod, and the waves were bigger there than they are here."

"I don't see why you couldn't come about, though I am glad you didn't."

"It wasn't safe to turn round in those big waves. When I got the steamer all ready to sail after she was built, I hired a sailor from New York who had been in such boats to show me how to manage her. He told me it wasn't safe to come round in a very heavy sea."

"Where were you going in the steamer?"

"I was going to Montoban. I want to sell the boat, for half I'm worth is in her, and she don't pay on Lake Modogo. I guess I can get Singerlay to buy her for his boy."

Andy did his best to persuade Captain Boscook to do as he intended, and go to Montoban, but he refused.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—THE GALE ON LAKE MONTOBAN.

ANDY could not and did not deny that Lake Montoban was violently agitated by the fierce gale that was blowing from the northeast; but he insisted that the Lily ought to weather the sea without any great difficulty. He had seen the lake in a worse condition in the spring and fall, though never in the present state.

"Is there anything weak about the boat or her engine?" asked the pilot.

"She is as strong as she was the day she was finished," replied Captain Boscook. "But I should as soon think of jumping into the lake and trying to swim to Montoban as of going in any boat."

"If I had the Dragon here, Dolph Singerlay's sloop, I should put two reefs in her mainsail, and sail for Montoban without thinking that I was running any great risk," remarked Andy, with one eye on the treasure bag all the time, for the Lily was now under the lee of Bunkel Island, on the south side, where the water was comparatively smooth, and the pilot had rung to stop her.

"You wouldn't catch me in any boat such a day as this," the owner insisted; and Andy realized that it was useless to battle with the fears of the timid man.

"If you want to sell your steamer, Captain Boscook, you must prove that she is stiff, weatherly, and safe when there is a little wind on the lake," added Andy, as a last argument. "If you are afraid of her, Mr. Singerlay will not want to buy her."

"I guess I won't risk the boat and my life to show him that she can stand a hurricane. I never went out in her on our lake when the wind blew hard."

"Here we are; and what are you going to do?" asked Andy, terribly disappointed at the result of the conference.

The machinist's son had a lively imagination, practical as he was in the business of life; and he had already pictured in his mind the scene when the Lily arrived at Montoban.

Thousands of people would gather on the shore to see the steamer, for such a sight had never been seen on these waters before. The storm, and even the rain, which had just begun to fall, would not keep them in the house with such a spectacle within reach.

The boat could not make a landing in the rough sea in front of the town, and he should pilot her to the boathouse of Mr. Singerlay, where she would be perfectly sheltered from the storm. The mighty magnate of the lower town would meet him on the deck or on the shore, and then he should have the supreme felicity of handing over to him the bag containing the funds of the two banks, informing him at the same time that his son was on Bunkel Island.

His heart leaped when he thought of it. But the owner of the Lily would not go to Montoban that day, and it was a grievous check to the enthusiasm of the pilot.

"What are you going to do?" asked Andy, repeating the question which the owner did not answer.

"I hardly know what to do," replied Captain Boscook.

"If you will run up to Montoban, I will do the best I can to persuade Mr. Singerlay to buy the Lily; and on account of some circumstances, I think I should succeed," continued Andy, when he found the owner was undecided.

"I wouldn't go across that wide place ahead if he would give me double the price I ask for the boat," protested the captain. "I don't know what to do. The water is smooth here."

"All right; we will anchor here," suggested the pilot.

"Anchor? We haven't got any anchor. Two of them belong to her, but I put them ashore to lighten her in going over the shoal."

"Then we can't remain here, for most likely we should have to stay all night, and I shouldn't want to drift about in the dark," said the pilot. "We had better go down the lake and get the anchors."

It required some eloquence to convince Captain Boscook that it was safe to do this, for he had been terribly frightened off Pink Point, where the sea was heaviest. But the pilot carried the point at last. Then Andy asked if there was anything to eat on board, and was told where he might find all he wanted.

On the lower deck he found a regular galley. The engineer, who was even more scared than the captain, was glad to see him, and helped him to the meal he wanted. The pilot assured him there was not a particle of danger to the boat as long as the engine held out, and was properly cared for.

Sparks had never even seen any other steamer, and the Lily had never left her pier before when it blew as hard as at the present time. But he was reassured by the talk of the pilot.

When Andy had finished his hearty meal, he returned to the pilot house with the bag in his hand, for he would not leave it for a moment. The captain wanted to know why he lugged that heavy bag about with him when it would be as safe as anything could be on the steamer. He was sure that he did it because he did not believe what he said about the safety of the boat.

Andy rang the bell, and Sparks started the engine. Andy had not lost all interest in the island, and he decided to go through the strait on the return, though he knew it was the roughest place on the lake. The captain did not know it, and he said nothing.

The pilot knew all about the depth of the water, and he ran the Lily as near to it as it was prudent to go, for he wanted to see if there was any one stirring on Bunkel.

He wondered if Poddy had yet discovered what he had on the end of his line in the shaft. Of course the occupants of the cave had seen the steamer before this time, for she had been at the south of the island for over an hour.

Andy watched the shore, and carried his gaze all over the island; but no one was to be seen, though he had no doubt that Poddy and Tom were observing the movements of the Lily. They did not show themselves.

"It blows harder than ever," said Captain Boscook, as soon as the Lily reached the western point of the island, where she was exposed to the full rake of the blast. The waves certainly mounted higher here than at any other point on the lake. The wind was dead ahead, and the course of the steamer was directly against the sweep of the billows. The owner declared that he had never seen anything like it before.

The waves broke against her bow, and deluged the forward deck with water. Sparks shouted through the speaking tube that the waist was all afloat. But the Lily did not roll in this sea, and her motion was not so disagreeable as it had been when she was going before it.

"Put on your hatches, if any are off, and give her full steam!" shouted the pilot through the tube.

The owner went to the main deck to see that everything was secure. He returned soon, and said that no water could get into the hold.

Under the direction of the pilot, the Lily behaved exceedingly well, and in a few minutes she had passed through the strait. The captain began to regain his confidence, and Andy declared that the steamer was a first rate sea boat. She was as stiff as a rock, and could stand five times as much sea as she was getting. The captain was cheerful, and became a different man.

In three quarters of an hour, in spite of the head sea and the strong wind, the Lily reached the foot of the lake.

Andy considered the question of landing at Bushrod, and for two reasons decided not to do so. First, he would have to ride fifteen miles to get home, a part of the way in the night, and he would not risk it. Second, Captain Boscook wanted him to remain on board and pilot the boat to Montoban as soon as the weather would permit.

The boat went to the point where her anchors had been left, or as near it as the water would permit, and brought them on board in her tender. There were four staterooms on board, and one of them was assigned to the pilot. He conveyed the treasure to it, and slept with it under his head that night.

He was very tired, and he slept as soundly as though he had been in his own bed. At the first peep of day, Captain Boscook came to his door and said that it had cleared off, and he was ready to start for Montoban as soon as he had steam enough. Andy had arranged his plan, and he, too, was ready to start.

The Lily went first to the Bay of Islands, and Andy showed the captain

where he could lie in safety. The owner wanted to go to Montoban. Andy said he was doing a job for Mr. Singerlay which might induce the gentleman to purchase the Lily. He could not explain it yet, but the owner would know all about it soon. If the steamer took part in the enterprise, the magnate would be likely to buy her.

Captain Boscook did not like to wait, but he had learned to place a great deal of confidence in Andy, and he concluded to trust him. The boat was run over to Bunkel; and the captain was to take the steamer over to the Bay of Islands when Andy left her, as he intended to do.

Andy had carried his bag to the pilot house. The captain wanted to know what he had in it.

"It does not belong to me, and I have not opened it," replied the pilot of Lake Montoban. "But I know this: if you should take this bag to Mr. Singerlay, he would buy your steamer as soon as he looked into it."

"What is in it?" asked Captain Boscook.

"I have not the key, and cannot open it. I must leave it in your care, and if you keep it safely, your boat is sold."

The owner promised to do so; but he did not even know that the banks had been robbed, for he had not been on shore for three days.

Andy kept out of sight as the Lily approached the island, and at the place where he had boarded her he launched the tender without being seen by either the robbers or their prisoners.

CHAPTER XXXV.—THE BATTLE OF BUNKEL ISLAND.

By getting under the rocks which formed a cliff abreast of the grotto on Bunkel Island, the steamer could not be seen unless the observer stood on the hill. It was early in the morning, and the occupants were not stirring.

Andy paddled the tender to the water cave where he had made such a tremendous haul the day before.

He had not decided upon his operations for the day, for it was necessary for him to ascertain the situation on the island before he attempted to do anything. Dolph and Phin knew where to find him when they wanted to see him, and he seated himself in the boat to await their coming.

He looked into the "oven," as he called the space at the foot of the shaft, into which the traveling bag had been lowered by its owner. The rock he had carefully prepared as a substitute for his treasure was there, though it was not in just the place he had left it. Poddy had no doubt tried the line many times, and the weight of the rock had satisfied him that the bag was in its proper situation.

Andy had eaten a hearty breakfast on board of the Lily, and had never felt in better condition for active operations. Exhilarated by his former success in obtaining possession of the treasure, he viewed the rest of the work as comparatively easy. He had not proposed to himself to arrest the robbers, or to get into a battle with them. All he wanted now was to see Dolph and Phin. The lake was smooth, and he could take them over to the Bay of Islands where the steamer was waiting for him.

Possibly his former success had made Andy impatient, and he found that waiting for something to occur was the most trying duty he had been called upon to perform.

He listened with all his ears for any sound from the grotto above him ; but neither voice nor movement could be heard. It was six o'clock, and it was time they were stirring.

He was sure that the prisoners would be on the lookout for him ; but he concluded that they would not be permitted to leave the cave till the robbers were in condition to keep watch of them.

The wind had backed to the northwest, and it was chilly doing nothing in the water cave. Andy hauled the tender up to the shelf when his patience was about exhausted. Then, landing on the rocks, he walked towards the plain.

Near the savins where he had concealed himself the day before, he halted and looked about him.

He could see no one near the entrance to the cave ; and he stopped to think. It occurred to him that the situation had essentially changed since he had been on the island before. Poddy had seen the steamer, for she had remained a full hour off the landing rock, and he knew she was somewhere on the lake.

It was plain enough to Andy that the robber would not allow the prisoners to show themselves on the island, as he had done before. The Lily was liable to appear at any minute. If Poddy or Tom Sawder had been out of the cave that morning, they must have seen the steamer go in among the islands on the other side of the lake.

Dolph and Phin could not know that Andy had been on board of the Lily, and the robbers were not aware that he had been on the island.

Andy was rather uneasy after he had waited another half hour. He walked very cautiously towards the middle of the island, hoping to obtain some information that would guide his future movements. He went as near the entrance of the cave as he dared, without seeing any of the occupants.

Keeping behind the trees as much as he could, he made his way to the north side of the island, for he wished to ascertain whether or not the Lily could be seen from any part of the shore.

He could find no place which commanded even a glimpse of her.

This was what Andy called dull music, and he started on his return to the other side of the island. But he had not taken ten steps before he heard something moving in the distance. He dropped into a clump of savins and waited, and it seemed to him just as though the music was going to be livelier.

He seated himself on a rock behind the trees to watch the movement near the cave. It was not a cow, nor a horse, nor a sheep, for there was none but human animals on the island.

The motion had been partly concealed by the trees, so that he could not make out what it was. But it soon assumed shape, and he saw that it was a human being. He could not yet make him out, but he examined his revolver with care.

Andy soon satisfied himself that the person was moving to the north side of the island. Very likely he was on the lookout for the steamer; she was not on the south side, as he could see from the entrance to the cave, and he was going to look for her in the other direction.

He was concealed the greater part of the time by the trees, so that Andy could get only an occasional glimpse at him.

The distance was short, and he soon came where the observer obtained a better view of him. As he looked at the hill he saw a thin cloud of smoke rising above it, which indicated that a fire had been made in the cave. Andy thought this was very stupid on the part of the robber, who might have known that the smoke would betray his presence as readily as his body.

The person approaching proved to be Tom Sawder. Andy watched him closely. He ought to have been afraid of him, but he was not. He certainly did not wish to encounter him, for such a meeting was sure to end in a fight.

But even this prospect did not alarm Andy. The hoodlum was gazing with all his might at the lake, and did not appear to see the island under his feet.

Andy lay down upon the ground, and worked his body into the shelter of the trees as far as he could.

His concealment, though the best that this part of the island would afford, was not satisfactory to him. If Tom came near the spot, he could hardly help seeing him. But Andy was obliged to take his chances, and was sorry he had left the water cave, where he was perfectly protected.

Tom went to the shore, and took several positions for looking out upon the lake. He could not see what he was looking for, for Andy had satisfied himself on this point before.

This visit of the hoodlum convinced Andy that the occupants of the cave had not seen the steamer when she came to the island to land him. If they had been aware of her early visit, they would have watched her, and would have known that she had run into the Bay of Islands.

When Tom had satisfied himself that the steamer was not in sight, he started to return to the cave. He had made his last observation at a point near where Andy was concealed, and he passed within a few feet of him.

He was still looking out upon the lake, and zigzagging about to favor his purpose. He seemed to be examining the shores of Castle Hills, on the other side of the lake.

While thus employed he halted, within three feet of Andy. Then he moved sideways, so as to see through a vista in the trees, and stumbled over his legs.

As he looked to see what had interrupted his movement, Andy sprang to his feet. Tom fell back when he discovered his former enemy.

"What are you doing here, Andy Lamb?" demanded Tom, as soon as he had recovered a little from his astonishment.

"I am looking about on the island," replied Andy. "What are you doing here, Tom?"

"None of your business!" answered the hoodlum.

"I don't know that it is any of your business what I am doing here, either," returned Andy cheerfully.

"I guess 'tis; I'll let you know 'tis! I told you I'd give it to you if I got a sight of you again," said Tom, as he doubled up his fists, and looked as though he was intent upon keeping his promise.

"Give me what, Tom?" asked Andy.

"The biggest lickin' you ever had in your life!" answered the bruiser, as he advanced upon his enemy.

"Can't you put it off till we have some one to see fair play?" asked Andy.

"Fair play or foul, I'm goin' to lick you within an inch of your life!" exclaimed Tom, as he struck at Andy's face.

Andy parried the blow, and then tried to induce Tom to postpone the affair; but the bruiser could not forget his former defeat, and he pressed the champion of the fair skipper so that there was no escape.

Tom was boiling with wrath by this time; and when he had hit Andy a few times, the latter was in the same condition, and ready to meet the issue.

It was useless to conduct the battle on peace principles, and Andy used his science to the best advantage. Tom was the heavier of the two, but Andy was the quicker, and the more skilful in handling his fists. Twice he knocked his antagonist down, and one of these falls on a rock appeared to have hurt Tom's back; but he did not give it up.

Both of the combatants were covered with blood, and Tom's right eye was closed. Andy had been badly punished, and he, too, looked as though he had been "through the wars." It was time the combat was brought to a close, and he rallied all his forces to end it. He threw himself on Tom, and a savage blow brought him to the ground for the third time.

Tom was not in condition to "come to time," and he drew a revolver from his hip pocket.

Oliver Optic.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE LETTER.

SHE sat with pen uplifted
Above her paper white;
Across her face there drifted
A ray of happy light.

Her heart with words was ready:
"My darling" write and send!
She smiled—her hand was steady—
She only wrote, "My friend."

Lydia Avery Coonley.

THE GOLD DELUGE.

Astounding consequences arising from the discovery of a chemist—Terror of the governments to whom unlimited gold meant destruction—The extraordinary lengths to which Erik Poulsen was driven to maintain his independence.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

ERIK POULSEN, a Danish chemist, after several years of experimenting, succeeds in discovering how to make gold. He is anxious to publish the formula to the world, but his government will not hear to it, declaring that it will overturn civilization. So he and his wife depart for Berlin, and here he is offered the crown of a small kingdom in exchange for his secret, to be the property of Germany. But he indignantly declines and leaves for Paris, where he proposes to lay the facts before the editor of a widely circulated journal of chemistry and reap the fame that is his due, even if he should thereby be bereft of the fortune his discovery has brought him. But here, too, he is made aware that he is under constant surveillance, to prevent the publication of his secret, and finally he retreats to a small, rocky island off the coast of Spain, where he broods over his powerlessness. Finally he builds a completely equipped steamer, the *Chemeia*, and seeks to escape to other lands. At once, however, a French and an English man of war are sent on his track, but they are finally eluded, and the *Chemeia* seeks refuge in the icy regions about the South Pole.

After long deliberation Erik decides to take his crew into his confidence, and they agree to stand by him. He writes out a full account of his invention, and when they fall in with a whaler intrusts it to Szemsky, one of the seamen, to be published to the world when he succeeds in reaching civilization. The *Chemeia* remains in the neighborhood of the Pole for a year, then steams northward, all on board eager to note what changes the promulgation of the secret has made in the affairs of men. But they are soon intercepted by an English ship, armed with the newest contrivance for capturing foes, and Erik is sent to an insane asylum on the Shetland Islands. After a while he finds that Szemsky is also confined here, and the two concoct a scheme to escape, in the course of carrying out which Erik is compelled to blow up the building, using his knowledge of chemicals to provide him with the means.

CHAPTER XVII.—FREEDOM AND REUNION.

SZEMSKY was the first to rouse himself. He brought Erik back to consciousness with a rude shaking. The latter opened his eyes slowly, and looked around. He remembered nothing. What had happened? Then, on a sudden, he recollected all.

Both sat down, bruised and sore, on an iron beam upon which they had climbed to view the scene of destruction. They were amazed at their miraculous escape from death. There, below in the débris, they saw many bodies, and now they heard the alarm of fire ringing out wildly. The left wing of the building was burning. All cell doors had been burst open by the shock, and the insane prisoners had escaped. Order and discipline were followed by wild riot and mad struggles for safety.

The fire brigade, formed of the employees, made an attempt to save the

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burning left wing, but the lunatics fell on them wildly and prevented the work of extinguishing the flames. All efforts to save the building were then given up; other help on the island there was none. Only a few fishermen lived there with their families, and they all escaped at the first shock, in deadly fear of the insane prisoners. They abandoned their homes and made for the open sea in their fishing boats.

"How will we get down?" Erik asked after a long silence. Both were weak and exhausted from their terrible ordeal.

Szemsky pointed to a piece of the rope dangling from the iron girder where it had become coiled around a projection. He motioned to Erik to lower himself first. Erik fastened the rope securely and slid down.

The destruction everywhere was awful. Dead bodies were strewn about. They both felt themselves to be murderers. Why had they not been killed? It would have been better for their consciences, they argued.

Then Erik pulled himself together with an effort and rose. A new light shone in his eyes. It had not been a question of individuals with him, but that of a grand cause.

"Forward, Szemsky!" he cried. "The English government is the murderer; on its own head be the blood of the innocent victims. The world will now be freed from the tyrant; I shall be the avenger!"

Standing there, in the midst of ruin and desolation, he presented a grand spectacle—this man imbued with exalted ideas—which he wished not *one*, but all the world to benefit by. How short sighted he had been! Why had he declined kings' crowns and countless acres of land? Why had he not said "Yes" to all these offers? Had he done so, the various governments—one distrustful of the other—would all have made tons and tons of gold—hundreds of billions in money; they would have flooded the earth with a tide of yellow metal, and the precious gold would immediately sink to zero in value, and the secret belong to the entire world.

It was not yet too late. He could still be victorious.

"Forward, Szemsky! Time is precious. We must not lose a moment."

Szemsky quickly descended by the rope and reached the lower floor, which was covered with heaps of iron, stone, and splintered wood.

A man half clad, a silk hat on his head and a gorgeous necktie around his neck, approached them, and with a mock courtesy, said,

"So glad you have come down from your fiery chariot. I certainly have the great honor of addressing the prophet Elias? My name is James Cook, celebrated English explorer, don't you know? Just got back from a trip around the world. I am going soon again."

Another idiot approached.

"Your ailment is chronic gastric trouble," he said with an unsteady glitter in his eye, as he brought forth a huge pair of shears. "It is positively necessary, to cure you, that I operate on your stomach with this instrument. Come, hurry; I have many patients."

Szemsky grasped him from the rear, tore the shears from his hands, and flinging them far off, said, "There is your instrument, doctor; go run after it."

"Chief, I beg you," the insane man began, with a grin, "chief, try cold water externally and dry bread internally; that will help you." Then he ran after his shears.

The strangest kinds of figures bobbed up here and there in the path of the fugitives, and performed their insane antics, but Erik and Szemsky were too anxiously seeking means of escape to trouble themselves much about them.

"How shall we get off the island?" Erik asked. "Can we obtain a boat?"

They hastened to the shore, but all the fishermen's boats had been taken away, and the yacht belonging to the institution, which was moored a short distance out, had been reached by a number of insane prisoners who swarmed all over her decks.

"We must walk around the island until we find some board," Szemsky said, and both started on their search.

It was bright daylight now. The sun bathed the island in its warm, grateful light. From the sea was wafted a fresh salt breeze, and both fugitives felt thankful for its cooling effect on their feverish brows. They ascended a rocky promontory whence they had a full view of their surroundings.

The Shetland group consists of about one hundred small islands, not more than thirty of which are inhabited. The asylum was built on one of the most desolate of these, and the outlines of the largest of the islands—Mainland—were only dimly visible in the east. The conflagration must have been noticed from there, however, and assistance would probably soon arrive.

"Is not that a sail?" Szemsky inquired, his eagle eyes fixed on a speck in the distance.

How could they escape before it was too late? They hastened back to the shore, but not a single boat—nothing that they could float on, was visible. They had circled completely around the island. Everywhere they met escaped lunatics who were also in search of boats.

Szemsky's teeth were compressed in his terrible anxiety. They heard loud cries; the sounds of battle. What could it be? Were the insane people fighting?

They clambered over a projecting cliff, which had obstructed their view, and now they saw all that was going on below.

Great heavens! A large cutter and an immense mass of people madly fighting for possession.

Apparently there were three distinct groups—one, composed of the asylum officials; the second, consisting of the lunatics; and the third—*who were they?* Erik and his companion could not make that out.

They both approached nearer silently and unseen until they were close to the combatants. The keepers were fighting, some of them with knives in their hands, stabbing right and left.

Szemsky started sharply and pointing his finger at the third group cried out, "*Captain Alsloev!*"

Erik was as though transfixed—his eyes were riveted on a female form being tossed about ruthlessly in the group of fighting men.

"*My wife!*" he cried wildly and rushed forward. That one question so long uppermost in the minds of both the fugitives, and which neither had time to ask or answer, owing to the exciting incidents they had passed through, came to both again—where had the crew of the Chemeia been taken?—but now the answer was also found to the question. *They were all imprisoned, including Erik's wife, in the asylum.*

The next instant the two fugitives plunged in the thickest of the fight. Victory seemed momentarily to be with the insane contingent, which was led by the crazy doctor, flourishing his deadly shears, his high silk hat and glaring necktie making him a prominent figure in the combat.

Erik saw at once that only by a ruse could he demoralize them.

"Back!" he yelled like a Comanche Indian. "Here comes the prophet Elias! Give way there for my fiery chariot!" and he motioned to his friends to retreat. His wife had seen him and with a glad cry of recognition tried to reach him, although she felt it was not the time for embraces then, but action.

At the sound of Erik's voice, the leader of the lunatics at once set up an enthusiastic, crazy howling. "Hurrah, for the glorious prophet Elias!" and again, "Hurrah! Long life to the great prophet!" This was repeated frantically by the rest of the crazed group of men until Erik's voice silenced them. "What do you want with the boat?" he asked. "The water is *too wet* to go sailing today. Do you not behold the Philistines who incarcerated you? *There they are! At them! Go; lock them in your cells.*"

An ear splitting babel of wild, hoarse shouts arose, as the insane men attacked the keepers viciously.

While the third party slowly edged their way towards the cutter, the lunatics fiercely fought their erstwhile captors. The boat was for the time being entirely forgotten. Erik gave a signal to his friends and all boarded it in hot haste. They were victorious thus far.

"*The prophet Elias is a traitor!*" one of the keepers now shouted, adopting Erik's own tactics. "He deceives you to get the boat from you. *Hold fast to the ropes!*"

Again the imbeciles made a rush for the cutter and grasped the ropes.

"Weigh the anchor!" Captain Alsloev commanded, in stentorian tones.

Twenty desperate hands seized and held the anchor lines, drawing the cutter slowly in shore.

"This won't do!" Captain Alsloev shouted. "Somebody get an axe. 'We must cut the ropes!'"

The hasty search for an axe was fruitless, and the cutter had been almost pulled on the sand. A critical moment had arrived, and all on board felt it. The crazy pursuers were only a few feet off, when Szemsky sprang into the bow of the vessel and shouted loudly:

"On your knees! Your faces to the dust! Do you not see the prophet Elias in his fiery chariot over your heads? Look!"

The lunatics unconsciously ceased tugging at the anchor rope for a moment, while they turned their faces skyward. That instant the rope was violently torn from their grasp by determined hands; the cutter rolled from side to

side under the terrible strain, and, carried by the current, drifted rapidly out to sea.

They were saved!

The sails were quickly set, and not a moment too soon. The vessels from the Mainland island were just landing their corps of soldiers.

CHAPTER XVIII.—PRIVATION.

VERY soon the cutter reached the open sea; a stiff breeze sent her merrily skimming over the waves, and a sigh of relief escaped from Erik and his wife.

Their meeting after the long separation was very affecting, and gradually the others of the faithful crew, who had remained at a respectful distance during the happy reunion of husband and wife, approached one by one to shake hands.

Erik and Szemsky looked around in search of several faces they missed, and finally asked: "Where is our lively mate Smith, Jackson the engineer, jolly old Peter Brown, Herve, and the fat cook Prosper?"

No reply.

The faces of the survivors saddened and Kelly's mouth twitched suspiciously.

"Alsloev—tell me—I beg you!" Erik beseeched the captain, grasping him by the arm to look into his face. "Where are they—*over there?*" pointing to the wrecked asylum.

The captain nodded sadly. "Yes—crushed to death," he said, almost inaudibly.

"The earthquake that gave us freedom gave them death," Junker added.

"*Earthquake!*" Erik repeated, startled out of his reverie. "Earthquake! No, no! *That was my work!*"

Every one caught his breath, and Szemsky had to tell the thrilling story of their escape to eager listeners, while Erik silently stood by, his face buried in his hands.

"Do not worry over it, dearest," said his wife. "It was to be so and you could not help it."

The cutter carried all the sail she could bear. Occasionally a vessel appeared in dim outline on the far horizon only to vanish again. This decided the fugitives to efface the name of the asylum, painted in large letters on the bows of the cutter.

"Whither are we sailing?" was the question asked.

"To France," Erik replied.

He forgot that there were no provisions or water on board, and that several members of the crew had been severely injured in the late battle. Kelly, usually the liveliest of all, kept himself apart from the others, and whenever he believed himself unobserved or unheard, gave vent to loud groans of pain which he could not keep back.

It was a question whether they could trust themselves to the mercy of any craft they should run across. They were all clad in the raiment furnished

them at the asylum, and not one of them had a penny to his name—not even Erik, with his ability to make untold millions at pleasure.

The most important question for them now was what to do and how to do it.

Some one inquired whether the cutter had been thoroughly searched, and Captain Alsloev replied that he had done so very carefully.

He said that, besides the ballast he had found nothing except a few old scraps of iron, several cases of medicine, belonging to the asylum, and—now that he remembered it—he had also found fishing implements.

“What do the medicine cases contain?” Erik inquired.

Alsloev disappeared into the hold of the vessel, and with the help of Junker and Atkin brought forth two heavy chests. These were pried open and Erik found in them several dozens of packages and bottles containing acetous protoxide of potash, lead, carbolic acid, ether, dried arrowroot, and—his face brightened very much—bromide of potash, pure alcohol, quinine, deadly nightshade leaves, opium, cocoa—that was all. There were no other liquids fit for drinking, as they had hoped.

“Tell me, captain,” Erik asked, “how long will it take to reach the French coast?”

“From two to three weeks, if this wind lasts; if not, it will take longer.”

“We cannot live as long as that without water,” Erik rejoined, “and we dare not land on English soil; it would mean recapture. Can we not reach some other place—Norway, for instance?”

“Or the Faroe Islands,” Kelly suggested.

“By Jove, you’re right; I forgot them,” the captain exclaimed. “We can reach these islands in a few days.”

“Change the course of the vessel for the Faroe Islands,” Erik ordered.

“That is the safest port for us just now. Listen, men, to what I say. We may be fortunate enough to catch a few fish, and besides there is a quantity of arrowroot, which, though hard to digest in its raw state, will yet have to do in the emergency, as we have no water in which to boil it; we also have some cocoa on board, and this will at least assist us in bearing our sufferings from hunger. To alleviate the pangs we can use the opium; it is a remedy which quickly subdues pain and also retards the digestive functions. Opium smokers live for many days without food of any sort and yet do not suffer.”

“Good,” Kelly interjected; “we will all become opium eaters.”

“This drug will at least prevent our dying from starvation,” Erik went on, “and the cocoa will sustain us until we reach land, I hope. Dissolve the opium by giving one part of it to ten parts of alcohol; of this solution each of you take five to ten drops when hunger’s pangs assail you, except those having duty at the helm. We will relieve each other.”

Erik distributed liberal portions of arrowroot and opium among the men, and when, a few hours later, they began suffering from thirst, each man took his first dose of the tincture and the plan worked admirably. The craving for water was not entirely removed, although greatly relieved. Several of the men, more susceptible than the others, could not withstand the effects of the potion and fell into light slumber.

Erik noted these, and at the next distribution reduced their allowances accordingly, with better results.

The men brightened considerably and were cheerful once again ; the future seemed more promising, and, strange to say, the old time jokes merrily passed the rounds again. They were even gay.

"Hurrah. . The Faroe Islands !"

The joyous cry came from several parched throats. Adverse winds and contrary currents had kept the gallant little vessel on the high seas over four days, struggling to reach land. The crew had become hollow cheeked, and most of them lay around on deck in high fever.

Four days without water ! Their sufferings had now become unbearable.

The high, solitary cliff yonder is Sunnboe Steinum, usually called the "Monk," and is situated about a mile below Sunnboevur and Syderoe.

Water ! Water ! Soon—soon they will have water !

High mountains, almost perpendicular in their abrupt ascension from the sea, rise up in the distance, and there lies Syderoe.

Blow, winds, fill the sails ! Seconds are like hours. Now slowly approaching the shore, they sought for a safe landing place ; the mountains—seeming like stone walls to the newcomers—appeared to be unapproachable ; thousands of birds circled around the summits screaming wildly at the intrusion. Not a human being could be seen.

The sea was calm, and only a low line of breakers splashed gently against the rocky walls, gradually carrying the vessel inshore.

Otto M. Moeller.

(TO BE CONCLUDED.)

A YACHTSMAN'S SONG.

ON the breast of the dimpling bay
 The white winged yachts careen,
 To the strong sea airs they lean,
 On the rippling tide they sway ;
 With an upward plunge and a downward lunge,
 And a tack to the south away,
 In calm or in gale it is good to sail
 On the breast of the dimpling bay.

When the rosy flush of the dawn
 To the eastward fills the sky,
 When the twilight paints it fawn,
 When the stars are lit on high ;
 Through the sunlit days, in the evening haze
 If the face of the madcap spray,
 With the breeze in the west, with the wind at rest,
 This life is of all good lives the best,
 On the breast of the dimpling bay !

A MONTH IN THE MOON.*

The marvelous experiences that grew out of the Lunar Company, Limited—How the catch-penny scheme of three adventurers was transformed into an extraordinary contribution to the world of science—Scenes and incidents of a sojourn on the earth's satellite.

CHAPTER XXVI (*Continued*).—KADDOUR BARS THE WAY.

"KADDOUR, have you lost your senses?" said Norbert sternly. "I am master here, and these men *shall* go out."

"Not if I can prevent it?" replied the dwarf.

"Do you mean to employ force?" said Norbert.

"Certainly, if it is necessary."

"Kaddour, I did not expect *you* to rebel. Have you forgotten our relative positions, and the fidelity you promised me? I am sorry to be obliged to remind you of your protestations. But you are acting in a way that is quite inconsistent with your duty."

This appeal went home, for Kaddour's eyes filled with tears. But he did not move an inch.

Thinking he was perhaps ashamed, Norbert signed to Virgil to take up Peter Gryphins by the shoulders while he grasped his feet. But Kaddour would not yield.

"It costs me more than I can say to appear ungrateful and to disobey you," he said sorrowfully. "But these men shall not go out from here while I live. They belong to me, and I do not feel inclined to give them up to any other tribunal."

Norbert looked at his chronometer.

"We have scarcely seven minutes left," he said. "Kaddour, in the name of all that is sacred, let us go by; do not oblige us to use force. You are putting us all in danger. Don't you know that every second is precious? Soon it will be too late. We shall all be lost."

The dwarf folded his arms, and remained motionless.

"Go!" he said. "I do not prevent you. But these men shall stay here."

"Must I kill you, or will you obey me?" cried Norbert, beside himself at the obstinacy of the dwarf, and rushing to the door to get a rifle.

Kaddour respectfully moved aside to let him pass.

Norbert ran to the drawing room, but could find nothing in the dark. He glanced at the window, and to his horror saw by the light of the electric lamp that the parachute now formed an angle of thirty five degrees, causing the

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esplanade to appear like a precipitous slope. A few moments more, and the enormous apparatus would be at right angles to it!

It was the precise moment he had fixed for adjusting the suspending cord. Not only would it be dangerous, but it was absolutely impossible to delay another minute.

"Virgil! doctor!" he cried, rushing back to the circular gallery, "there is not a moment to lose! Take a man each on your back and come!"

"These men shall not pass!" repeated Kaddour, barricading the door with his great arms.

Exasperated beyond endurance, Virgil threw himself on the dwarf, and tried to pull him down. But Kaddour simply took him by the wrists, and held him as if in a vise. Virgil could not move.

The struggle could not be maintained any longer. Norbert saw the hand of the chronometer drawing nearer and nearer to the supreme second.

"Come!" he said. "We must give it up. We cannot sacrifice our lives, and especially that of Mademoiselle Kersain, to these fellows. Quick! To the car!"

Satisfied now that he held the prisoners in his grasp, as time fought for him, Kaddour stepped aside to let Norbert pass.

"Quick! To the parachute!" cried the astronomer, leading the way.

As he reached the outer door, he perceived that Kaddour was not following him, and turned back to call him.

The gallery door was locked!

"Kaddour! Kaddour!" he cried, trying to force it open. "Make haste! Come! We have not a moment to lose!"

No reply.

It was but too true; there was not a moment to lose. The hand of the chronometer was pitilessly nearing the final second.

"Kaddour!" cried Norbert for the last time. "Come! I will forgive you, but come! We are going!"

Still no reply.

Norbert was obliged to return to the esplanade.

He was but just in the nick of time.

The angle now made by the parachute, as it turned round its suspending axis, was such that he had to climb the steel frame and slip down the cords into the car.

Once again he looked at his chronometer. The moment had arrived. A hundred and twenty seconds more, and if the travelers delayed longer to launch themselves into space, a terrible collision would ensue between the two worlds, crushing the parachute midway.

Norbert held up his arm towards the place where the cord was to be cut. At that instant Kaddour appeared at the threshold of the observatory. He held the electric lamp above his head, and looked at them.

"Come! come!" they all said, simultaneously holding out their arms to him.

But he sadly shook his head, and waved an adieu with his handkerchief.

"It is too late now," thought Norbert. He touched the spring. Instantly,

without the least shock, the parachute was set free, and fell rapidly and softly through space.

At once the observatory, the esplanade, and the whole plateau of Tehbali disappeared from view in the darkness, almost before the travelers knew what was happening. The moon, suddenly freed from her terrestrial attraction, sprang back to her own orbit amid strange rumblings around; and ever and anon a lurid light flashed with lightning-like swiftness across the sky.

The parachute, yielding to the superior attraction of the earth, the larger and heavier of the two globes, fell so rapidly towards it that the aneroid barometer went up at the rate of two degrees a second.

And yet the car seemed to be motionless, for not the slightest breath stirred, notwithstanding the speed at which they were traveling.

The only indication was the marked elevation of the temperature in the circular floor of the car, consequent on the rapidity of motion.

Norbert did not think fit to moderate the pace while they were going through the upper regions of the terrestrial atmosphere. He had, as well as he could tell, cut the cord of contact at the height of thirty thousand feet above sea level. But when the barometrical needle indicated a height of fifteen thousand feet, knowing that there was now breathable air, he decided to take to pieces the steel frame and lighten the apparatus.

"Come, Virgil, throw out our ballast at once—quickly!" said Norbert, taking off his own respirator.

Every one heard the order, and Virgil hastened to obey. The framework of the parachute was soon undone and thrown out of the car. It disappeared instantly, falling much faster than the silken covering, which floated in the air.

CHAPTER XLVII.—ON THE EARTH.

"In a few minutes we shall reach the earth," said Norbert. "We should have been there sooner had we kept our frame, but it was necessary to insure a gentle fall."

The travelers all imitated him by taking off their respirators.

It was strange that no one seemed particularly joyful at the prospect of a speedy termination to their dangerous descent. The terrible parting scene in the moon had doubtless much to do with the prevailing gloom, which was still further intensified by the black, silent night that surrounded the parachute as it fell faster and faster through the region of chilly, damp clouds.

The fog was so thick that the travelers could hardly distinguish one another's faces, and the electric light shone through a kind of watery halo.

The strange apathy was harmful to all, and Norbert made an effort to counteract it.

"In a few minutes," he said, "we shall touch the earth. I hope we shall come down softly; but possibly the first shock will be somewhat rough. We had better throw everything useless overboard at once. We will begin with the respirators. As soon as I tell you the time has arrived, you must each hang on by your hands to the circular network of the car. Do you feel

equal to it?" he added, turning to Gertrude, who seemed very much dispirited as she sat leaning on her uncle's shoulder, with an arm round Fatima's neck.

"I hope so," she replied. "But I cannot help thinking of those poor creatures whom we left up there. They haunt me. How could we abandon them? What must they think of us? What will become of them? They hate each other so. What a terrible fate!"

"I tried hard to bring them," replied Norbert; "but Virgil and I were powerless against the obstinacy of Kaddour. I could not sacrifice the lives of all of us, and perhaps the safety of the terrestrial countries on which the moon would have fallen. I went to the extreme limit of patience. If I had waited but two minutes more, in the chimerical hope of overcoming his obstinacy, a terrible catastrophe would have ensued. I was obliged to bow to necessity."

"But what did Kaddour want?"

"He wanted us to abandon his enemies on the moon, and he forcibly resisted our attempts to bring them with us. Of course we could not agree to so barbarous a proposal, but I never imagined that the unhappy dwarf would carry his obstinacy to the point of sacrificing his own life to the fury of revenge that possessed him."

The nearness of the earth became more and more evident. A tolerably strong wind had sprung up, blowing the parachute towards the west. The darkness was still excessive; but, looking downward intently, Norbert could vaguely distinguish shadows of trees and landscape features.

On a sudden a fine rain began to fall, which did not, however, inconvenience the travelers, who, sheltered by the parachute, were rather glad than otherwise to feel it.

They soon found that the wind abated as the rain fell. But the moisture increased the weight of the silk and Norbert perceived that they were falling a little too quickly.

"Look out!" he cried. "Throw the respirators over!"

They all did so, and the descent slackened at once.

Almost immediately afterward a gust of hot wind arose, bringing with it a quantity of sand, which dried the parachute in a few seconds, and blew it eastward again.

The car knocked against some obstacle and slowly passed it by with a rustling noise.

"A tree! We are down!" cried Norbert. "All get out and hang on to the bottom, keeping your feet well off the ground. There is no danger, if you contrive to avoid the first shock. Do you all understand? May I help you, Mademoiselle Kersain? And you, doct—"

A great bump cut him short. The parachute was on the earth. All the travelers held on manfully, except Smith, who fell out head foremost, while the car slightly rebounded.

"Look out for the second shock!" cried Norbert. "Hold on well! I shall jump off with a rope. But don't move."

They did as he said; and at the moment that the apparatus, after another

rebound, touched ground for the third time, Norbert, who had seized the opportunity to jump out, stopped it finally. The silk at once fell over him, and covered him with its folds.

"Disentangle yourselves! Get on your feet!" he cried, half smothered. "We are on the earth!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.—ON THE NILE.

AFTER a breathless struggle the travelers emerged, one by one, from the flapping folds of the parachute, and were not much hurt.

One had a bruise, another a sprained wrist. Mlle. Kersain had a scratch on the arm, Fatima a bump on her forehead, and Sir Bucephalus was slightly stunned. They all experienced a strange sense of fatigue, as if their limbs were half paralyzed, or as if leaden weights were fastened to their feet. But along with this was mingled an intense satisfaction at finding themselves once more on terrestrial soil.

Fatima expressed this feeling with her usual childishness. Falling on her knees she kissed the earth, saying, "My mother!" It was the only parent she knew, poor child!

As to the doctor, his professional instincts never deserted him, and his first act was to feel for his case of instruments; his second, to feel the nearest pulse.

"Good pulse!" he murmured mechanically. "Regular and full—eighty pulsations. Keep to a regular and nourishing diet!"

"Eh, doctor?" exclaimed Norbert, laughing. "It is easy to see that you come from the moon!"

"From the moon? Well, I really think—but where are we now?"

"I would willingly tell you if I knew. All that I can say is that in all probability we are in the Nubian desert. The soil is sandy, certainly, and that may have softened our fall. We can't expect to find out more in this thick darkness."

"I never saw such a black night, except, indeed, just now on our way down through the air. Well, one is thankful to be once more on the ground. How are we all getting on? How is Gertrude?"

"Mademoiselle Kersain says she is all right."

"And you, Sir Bucephalus?"

"Rather knocked about, but without any vital injury, I trust."

"And you, Virgil?"

"At your service, sir, and ready to go back again if needs must."

"Bravo!" said the doctor. "That's what I call pluck! Let me see, now. Fatima is there. And Smith? Where is Smith?"

"Yes, indeed. Where is Smith?" echoed Sir Bucephalus.

A hollow groan answered this query. It seemed to come from the ground. Groping on all fours, Virgil at last knocked against a human form.

"Halloa, comrade, what are you about?" asked Virgil, on finding that the body did not move, but remained head downwards with feet bent back to the ground.

"I don't know where I am," answered a sepulchral voice. "I have sand in my eyes, in my nose, everywhere! And I feel so heavy that I really must have broken all my limbs!"

"Rubbish! You fell head foremost in the sand, and you have still got your nose in it," replied Virgil, who began to understand the state of affairs. "Come, come, comrade, get up; the Nubian desert isn't a bath."

Suiting the action to the word, Virgil set Smith on his legs, and holding him by the arm, brought him back to the others, who were all seated on the bare ground.

They searched about for the provision basket, and found it with the electric light, under the folds of the parachute. The repast gave them fresh strength, and by the time it was concluded the first streaks of dawn had appeared in the east.

They could make out that they were on a vast sandy plain, over which every here and there were scattered clumps of palm trees, while a dark line of foliage in the distance evidently indicated the presence of water.

"I shall be much surprised if it is not the Nile," said Norbert. "As soon as it is quite daylight we will go and see."

"Why wait?" asked Gertrude. "Let us go at once. It will be a nice change to walk in fresh air without those frightful respirators."

"You are rather hard upon the respirators. We owe them our safety, after all."

"Well, you may call me ungrateful if you like, but, all the same, I must own that I greatly prefer the air of earth to the purest oxygen in the moon."

Every one agreed with her, and without further ado they left the parachute to its fate, and went towards the distant trees.

It took them an hour to reach the place, although it was only three miles off. They had forgotten what it was to have the sensation of weight in the limbs, having been accustomed to skim along like birds on the lunar globe.

The sun had risen above the horizon when our tired friends at length reached the side of a yellow, muddy river, and threw themselves down on its banks.

"It is certainly the Nile," Norbert said. "There is no similar river in this region of the world. But I wonder what part of the Nile! I can't say with certainty where we are, but I fancy we must be below Dongola."

"We shall not have long to wait," exclaimed Gertrude, whose clear sighted eyes had just discerned a little black spot far down in the stream. "Is not that a *dahabieh*?" she asked.

Every one looked in the direction she pointed, and perceived a tiny moving speck on the waters.

The black spot grew momentarily, and before many minutes Gertrude announced that it was a *dahabieh*, or Nile boat, and, moreover, that it contained red coats.

"Red coats?" said the baronet. "May you be right, for, if so, they are English soldiers."

"Hurrah for old England!" shouted Smith enthusiastically, subsiding after this one outburst into his usual calm.

"If they are English soldiers," said Norbert, "we must be quite close to the Egyptian frontier, or else the relieving army expected by Gordon must be already ascending the Nile. In either case we are sure to hear news of Khartoum."

"Of Khartoum!" echoed Gertrude, bursting into irrepressible tears. "Oh, my darling father! If I could only know all about you!"

The *dahabieh* came nearer and nearer. It had a gondola-like prow and a high cabin in the rear, and it was manned by twenty native rowers. The cabin was occupied by a detachment of English soldiers, who were evidently engaged in a reconnaissance up the Nile, as they glanced sharply from right to left of the banks.

On seeing our group making signs to him from the right bank, the commanding officer approached, and when within hearing distance shouted:

"Who are you? What are you doing there?"

The baronet came to the water's edge to reply, but was suddenly struck by the absurdity of what he was about to say.

"I can't possibly tell him we have descended from the moon," he murmured aside to his companions.

"Well," impatiently shouted the officer, "are you going to answer?"

"I am Sir Bucephalus Coghill, of 29 Curzon Street, Mayfair, and Wigmore Castle, in Devonshire, England," said the baronet. "These ladies and gentlemen are my friends. As to where we come from, that is another point, and I will take the liberty of keeping it to myself."

"Then what do you want with me?" said the officer, visibly annoyed.

"Simply that you would be so kind as to tell us where we are, and, if quite convenient, take us to your headquarters."

"Where you are? Why, near Wadi Halfa, of course," answered the officer, somewhat mollified by the courteous tone of the baronet, notwithstanding the decidedly suspicious appearance of the travelers. "As to taking you to headquarters," he continued, "I think it will be my duty to do so, even if you had not asked it. So I am quite prepared to accede to your request."

He ran the *dahabieh* to a convenient spot for landing, and threw a plank across to make a bridge by which the travelers could embark. That done, the rowers proceeded rapidly down stream again.

"You belong, doubtless, to the reserve?" asked the baronet, in an off-hand tone.

"What reserve?" answered the officer, somewhat haughtily, the shabby appearance of our travelers at close quarters not being particularly calculated to reassure him as to their status.

"I allude," said Sir Bucephalus, "to the English army of relief expected by Gordon."

"I am not aware of the existence of such an army. We are a detached corps from Cairo of two hundred men, quartered at Assouan and Wadi Halfa." His suspicions gaining ground, the officer then resumed, looking

severely at Sir Bucephalus, "Why do you question me? What concern is it of yours? Are you an agent of the Mahdi? You look very much like it. Where do you come from, and where are your papers?"

"My papers! I never had any," said the baronet, fumbling in his pocket. "But here is my card."

"Hump! A visiting card. Not much to be learned from that. However, you must answer for yourself at headquarters."

They were not long in reaching Wadi Halfa, a miserable, overgrown village at the head of the first cataract. The English were engaged in fortifying it with a view to the tardy expedition of a few months later.

The travelers were conducted under escort to the dilapidated old barrack that constituted headquarters, and were shut up for two long hours in a large room on the ground floor; so that they had plenty of time to take counsel together.

They all agreed with Sir Bucephalus that it would be impossible to own that they came from the moon; and so, after much deliberation, they settled to waive this point, and just state the fact that, besieged by the Mahdist army, they had escaped in a balloon from the Peak of Tehbali. This would be a sufficient answer, and thus they would escape the probable annoyance of inconvenient questioning.

At about nine o'clock in the morning a picket of soldiers came for the suspected spies. This was what Lieutenant Brown had designated them when he made his report to his commanding officer, before whom they were now led.

Major Wharton was a brave soldier and a rigid disciplinarian, but he had one fault which is often found in commanders of outposts—he was too suspicious. It is true that Lieutenant Brown had drawn up a highly colored report, dwelling especially on the shabby appearance of the little band whom, he said, he had found on the Nile bank, minus camels, boats, or escort of any kind; not to speak of the torn garments of two among them (M. Mauny and Virgil, whose coats bore traces of the hand to hand struggle they were engaged in just before leaving the moon); added to this, the evasive replies of the self styled English baronet were not calculated to disarm suspicion.

The major was therefore predisposed against the party.

"Who are you, and whence come you?" he asked the baronet, glaring at him with his large blue eyes as fiercely as he could.

The baronet began in a dignified, but somewhat hesitating manner to give his preconcerted explanations. His friends and he had escaped from the Peak of Tehbali, where they had sustained a siege from the Mahdist army. They had escaped in a balloon which had descended over six miles from the Nile.

The major soon cut short the rambling account, and interrupted him with:

"The Peak of Tehbali! Where is that mountain? I never heard of it. It is not on the map. Where are your papers?"

"I never had any; but here is my card," murmured the baronet piteously.

"Your card! Fiddlesticks! Do you imagine I can take that as a guarantee? And your companions, have they any papers?"

"Sir," said Norbert impatiently, "we have no papers, because we could only take necessaries in the car. But we are respectable people, and you and your government will, I warn you, be held responsible for any arbitrary detention of French subjects. That lady is the daughter of Monsieur Kersain, the French consul at Khartoum."

"Indeed!" replied the major ironically. "I am delighted to learn that mademoiselle is the daughter of Monsieur Kersain, the French consul at Khartoum."

Calling the subaltern in command of the picket, he gave him an order in a low voice, which was immediately obeyed with the promptitude characteristic of the British soldier.

"I am most charmed to learn who mademoiselle is," repeated the major; "and who may *you* be?"

"I am Norbert Mauny, astronomer at the Observatory at Paris. This gentleman is Dr. Briet, famed for his African explorations and for his botanical researches. This is my servant. The other is the valet of Sir Bucephalus, and, like his master, English. This young girl is in the service of Mademoiselle Kersain."

"Do you persist in stating that this young lady is the daughter of Monsieur Kersain, the French consul at Khartoum?"

"Certainly."

"Well, then," said the major, as steps were heard on the stairs, "here is Monsieur Kersain himself!"

Every one turned to the door.

It was indeed the consul in person, who had come in response to the message sent him by the major.

"My father! My darling father!" cried Gertrude, flying into his arms.

CHAPTER XLIX.—MUTUAL EXPLANATIONS.

MONSIEUR KERSAIN was no less surprised and delighted than his daughter.

"Gertrude, my beloved child!" he exclaimed, pressing her to his heart, and stroking her beautiful hair; "you here, my pet? How does it come about that we meet thus? I was thinking of you a minute ago, but little did I expect to see you this morning!"

"But how is it, my dear Kersain," said the doctor, "that you are at Wadi Halfa?"

"General Gordon," replied the consul, "asked me to do him the service of descending the Nile in one of the steam gunboats he was sending down, and proceed to Europe for the purpose of letting the civilized world know how he was situated. I could not refuse such a commission, and moreover I perceived that it was the only chance of putting an end to the blockade of Tehbali, where I knew you had been besieged. But I can't tell you how terribly anxious I have felt about you all."

Here Major Wharton, whose countenance had suddenly lost its severity, now interposed courteously with:

"Dear Monsieur Kersain, I see that you will answer for these gentlemen. I pray them to excuse the misconception which led to their being taken for other than they are. I shall be delighted if they and your daughter will honor me with their company at breakfast."

The prisoners bowed.

As is often the case, Gertrude had quite broken down now that the necessity for courage was past. She clasped her arms round her father's neck, and hiding her face on his shoulder wept copiously, the recollections of the terrible month she had passed depriving her of the power of speech.

The consul attributed her emotion solely to the dangers he had himself sustained, and said soothingly:

"Don't cry any more, my darling. We are together again now forever."

"Oh, yes, I will never leave you again, dear papa," she murmured, pressing closely to him; "never, never!"

"Never, pet," he repeated tenderly. "It was too painful to bear as it was. Tell me how it comes about that your uncle and yourself are here."

"You will be able to talk better here," courteously said the major, opening the door of his private sitting room for them. The other travelers remained in the common room.

The consul was so taken up with the joy of meeting Gertrude that he failed to perceive the presence of Norbert and the baronet. Alone with her father, she mastered her emotion at last, and, heaving a deep sigh, clasped her hands on her father's shoulder.

"If you only knew, dear papa," she said, "all that I have gone through, you would scarcely credit all I have to tell you, and indeed at times I myself even wonder whether it is not all a dream. Yet it is perfectly true. Uncle, Monsieur Mauny, Sir Bucephalus, Fatima, Virgil, and Smith will all bear out my statement that it is no illusion. We have just come from spending twenty nine days in the moon!"

"In the moon!" exclaimed her father, with a terrible misgiving lest Gertrude should have lost her reason. "What *are* you saying, child?"

"Oh, of course you find it difficult to believe me. But I assure you, darling papa, that I have not lost my senses, as you seem to think. You knew all about Monsieur Mauny's plans, did you not? Well, he has carried them into execution, that is all. We have spent nearly all the time on the moon."

"No doubt about it!" murmured the horrified father to himself. "The agony of our separation has turned my child's head! She is in a delirium. My darling Gertrude," he continued aloud, while striving to hide the tears that sprang to his eyes, "do you mean to tell me that Mauny and Sir Bucephalus are with your uncle?"

"Yes, papa; they have never left us. I made the wonderful journey in their company, and we all came down together this very night."

The consul could no longer bear his terrible suspicion. He rushed to the door, pale and haggard eyed, resolved to end the suspense.

"Monsieur Mauny," he cried, in a hoarse voice, "are you there?"

"Yes, consul," answered Norbert, hastening to meet him. He also was pale, and visibly much moved by some inward emotion. "Will you ever forgive me?" he said, as he pressed Kersain's outstretched hand.

"For what?" asked the unhappy father.

"For having exposed Mademoiselle Kersain to the perils of such an expedition! She will have told you that it was quite involuntary on my part, and that events took an unexpected course. We found ourselves in the moon quite without premeditation."

"What!" cried the consul. "You also! Has every one lost his senses? Briet! Sir Bucephalus!"

The doctor and the baronet hurried up.

"What is the meaning of this frightful delusion?" said Kersain, closing the door.

"What delusion?"

"My daughter and Mauny pretend that you—that you all came from the moon!" stammered the agitated consul.

"Well, that is the exact truth," replied the doctor, smiling.

"It is the truth," added Sir Bucephalus, in a less joyous tone.

"What! Do you mean to maintain, with Gertrude, and Mauny, that——"

"That we all started for the moon, stayed there one month, and came down again just now! That is the sober truth, my dear brother in law. And if you want a proof I will show you the superb geological specimens I brought back from the moon," he added, fumbling in his capacious coat pockets. "Good gracious! I must have left them behind on the table in my room. I have no head for anything," he cried; but added immediately, "Never mind, I can show you my Selenite manuscript, luckily!"

This he took out of his pocketbook, and held it out triumphantly to Kersain, who, in truth, did not know what to make of four such positive assertions, and ended by believing in all the proofs and details he heard, especially since Fatima, Virgil, and Smith confirmed the statements of the others.

"Shall I give you a piece of advice?" he said, when at length he was convinced. "Keep all this to yourselves, and tell no one, unless you are *certain* you will be believed. Otherwise you will be taken for charlatans or fools."

"We know that; and this very morning," answered the doctor, "we ran a risk of being arrested on account of our reticence. As it was we cut a sorry figure before the British major. But patience! It will all be proved in time."

Each one then related his adventures since they parted. Gertrude told her father all about the wonderful journey, and he in return detailed the news of Gordon and Khartoum.

"The Mahdist bands," he began, "must have cut or intercepted the telegraph wires as soon as the town was invested, for the messages that reached us afterwards left no doubt as to their origin. The general had thrown up numerous earthworks, and raised fifty or more batteries to guard against a

surprise. Day and night he was occupied with the discipline and well being of his troops, constantly reviewing them. In a few weeks' time the good results of this surveillance were most evident. But all his efforts were foredoomed to failure if no army of relief came, for without this assistance the fall of Khartoum could only be a question of time.

"The English Government were so dilatory about the matter, notwithstanding his repeated earnest representations, that General Gordon took the only course left to him—he resolved to appeal to the whole of the civilized world, whose interest it might be not to permit the Soudan to fall into the hands of the Mahdi, and he asked me to undertake the commission. I felt honored in accepting the brave hero's commission, which has not been without its dangers so far, for, before reaching the English lines, our gunboat was fired at no less than seventeen times between the confluence of the two Niles and Dongola.

"However, we have arrived here safely. I must now press on to Paris, as I promised Gordon, and make an appeal through the press to all the friends of civilization, that some concerted plan of action may be arranged.

"Do you think, doctor," added Kersain, after he had told his story, "that Gertrude could accompany me without fear for her health? Summer is at hand."

"Gertrude might go to Lapland now if she likes!" cried the doctor. "Do you not see what roses she has on her cheeks, and how greatly she has changed for the better? I never saw such an astonishing cure. It would seem as if the pure, refined, dry atmosphere of the moon was made for her. Gertrude may henceforth go where she pleases, and there is now not the slightest cause for any anxiety about her. This is one of the most curious results of our strange journey."

"In point of fact," answered her delighted father, "I did notice that she seemed extraordinarily well. But may I look upon it as a radical cure, and take it for granted that damp or cold climates will not in future be bad for her?"

"I tell you that the cure is beyond the shadow of a doubt," replied the doctor. "It has so amazed me that it would not take much to induce me to carry out a project I have in my head."

"What is it?"

"To establish a model hospital on the moon, as a kind of supplementary winter sanitarium."

"Be quiet; don't say anything more about the moon; you know it is to be a forbidden subject for the present," said Kersain, hearing the major's footstep outside.

The gallant officer came to invite them to take their seats at the breakfast table. He was evidently bent on effacing the recollection of his previous abruptness by the exceeding courtesy of his present demeanor. He insisted on sending a fatigue party to fetch the parachute and the travelers' luggage from the place of descent, which they indicated to him as minutely as they could.

But when the English soldiers arrived at the spot, there was not a trace

of luggage or parachute. Arabs had passed by, beyond a doubt, and after several hours of vain search the party returned empty handed.

At sunset Kersain proposed to resume his journey towards Cairo, and as the gunboat that had brought him so far was under orders to return to Khartoum, if possible, a *nuggha*, or flat boat, sometimes rowed and at other times drawn by beasts of burden, was hired to take him first to Assouan, and thence in the direction of the Egyptian Delta.

Of course Gertrude and Fatima, Mauny and Virgil, the baronet and Smith, and Dr. Briet, all accompanied him.

Major Wharton supplied his guests with all necessities, and furnished them with a military escort, and free passes enough to take them anywhere. The party descended the Nile, therefore, pretty rapidly, and were as happy as might be expected of friends who found themselves together once again after undergoing such trials and dangers.

One evening before their arrival at Cairo, Norbert was on deck with Kersain and Gertrude. It was a soft, starry night. No sound was to be heard except the rhythmical cadence of the oars and the monotonous chant of the rowers on the broad expanse of the river, that stretched away across the plain until lost to sight in the distance.

The moon had just risen in the east, and she seemed to look down tenderly on the audacious pioneer of science who had but so lately dared to snatch her from her sleep of centuries.

But Norbert now hesitated before a single word, a word which he had longed to say ever since he left Khartoum. Now was his opportunity, and Gertrude and her father both waited for him to speak out. At last, summoning up his courage, Norbert murmured, in a voice full of emotion :

"Consul, two months ago I asked you to give me your daughter. You were so good as to consent, provided I could find favor in her eyes. Mlle. Gertrude knows me better now than she did then. We have passed two months together, through trials that test character unmistakably. I, for my part, have formed, if possible, a far higher estimate than before of her courage, her intelligence, her heart, and may I venture to say, of her graciousness to myself. I must now ask in my turn whether I may not hope that she will one day make me happy."

"If you had asked it sooner, my dear fellow," replied Kersain affectionately, "you would have been out of suspense now. Know, then, that Gertrude loves you as much as she admires you, and she thinks with me that you will make the best of husbands, just as you are the bravest, the most generous, and the loyalest of men."

So saying, the consul put Gertrude's hand in that of Norbert, and pressed them both to his fatherly heart.

CHAPTER L.—WHAT THE WORLD SAID.

NEARLY a year had passed. It was now February. The gas was just being lighted in the streets of Paris one evening, as a cabriolet set Dr. Briet down at the door of a house in the Avenue de l'Observatoire. Quickly

mounting two flights of stairs, the doctor was respectfully welcomed on the landing by the most correct of valets, who was no other than our old friend Virgil, now faultlessly attired in a sober livery of black.

"They are all there, sir," he said, ushering the doctor into an elegant drawing room, in which sat M. Kersain, reading the paper by the fire, while Madame Mauny worked by the lamplight, and Norbert walked about the room.

"What do you think they have the audacity to say?" exclaimed Dr. Briet, as he rushed into the room. "That my Selenite manuscript is Ethiopian?"

"Who says so?" asked Norbert and Gertrude, with one accord.

"The Academy of Inscriptions, forsooth! It appears that the ancient kings of Ethiopia were in the habit of writing down their decrees on amianthus, and, strange to say, they were also accustomed to express their ideas by ideographic drawings. These are held to be conclusive proofs, and I was almost treated like an impostor when I persisted that I had brought the document from the moon."

"What about us, then?" cried Gertrude. "We are no better treated, for the Observatory will not believe a word Norbert says. They declare they must have seen it if the moon really descended twice to the earth. Now it is quite certain that at that very time the sky was so overcast for several days that all astronomical observations were impossible. It is equally certain that these clouds were due to the near approach of the moon, and also that there were tremendous storms and exceedingly high tides everywhere during those few days that were equally unexpected and inexplicable! No matter! They won't accept the only possible and simple solution which we offer them, but persist in treating all we say about the journey as purely imaginary."

Still fresh from his own fight with the Academy, her uncle listened to her eagerly.

"I know," he said, "that they all look upon our journey as a fiction of the imagination. But this is something still more exasperating, and enough to make any man angry. The idea that they should dare to insist that the Selenite document which you saw me take from the hand of a lunar Titan is nothing more than an Egyptian papyrus!"

"Well, well, uncle!" said Madame Mauny, laughing heartily, "we ought not to be surprised at anything, when those who ought to be the first to believe us are just as incredulous as the rest."

"My daughter means me, I know!" cried M. Kersain, throwing down his newspaper. "I really must own that, although at first I was inclined to believe your story, I could not help seeing its absurdity on reflection, and I cannot but think you were simply the victims of an illusion."

"Yes," said the doctor disdainfully; "an illusion that came upon seven or eight or eleven persons simultaneously!"

"Why not? I have a theory to explain it."

"Let us hear *your* theory, O most sapient consul!" said the doctor.

"My theory is that you are not at all mad," repeated M. Kersain. "Only——"

"Ah ! let us hear the *only*."

"Only you fell into the hands of that dwarf of Rhadameh, the greatest charlatan and most cunning magician on the face of the earth. He, knowing the project that had brought Monsieur Mauny to the Soudan, and knowing how, more or less, you were all bitten with the same mania, amused himself, for some unknown end of his own, in making you believe that it had happened."

"And how did he manage that, pray?"

"Something after this fashion. He hypnotized you, and then *suggested* this story to you. Or else he recounted it to you after placing you under the influence of hasheesh or some other drug."

"So that, according to you, we are all simply sleep walkers?"

"Simply."

"Well, how about my Selenite document, then?" cried the doctor triumphantly. "Did I dream that, too?"

"No. But that may be merely an accessory, made use of by the dwarf to confirm you in your illusion."

"Have you said all you have to say?" asked the doctor.

"All."

"Then," resumed the doctor, rising, and walking straight on M. Kersain, as if he intended to crush him by the force of his argument, "then be so good as to explain to me how it happens that Virgil, the baronet, and his servant, who were not with us when we fell into the hands of Kaddour, are all under the same illusion."

"Just simply because, when the dwarf made you prisoners, he took possession of the Peak of Tehbali, where he found Virgil and the baronet, and his faithful Smith. It was easy for him to subject them to the same treatment as yourselves."

"But what about the parachute?"

"No trace of it can be found."

The doctor took two or three turns in the drawing room, nursing his wrath; then standing still again in front of his brother in law, he exclaimed:

"It is of no use arguing with you. But if I had not left my geological specimens on the table in my room, at present on the moon, you would soon see!"

"The specimens prove no more than the papyrus," said Norbert laughing; "they have a great analogy with terrestrial rocks."

"Well ! so *you* have gone over to the enemy !" cried the doctor. "That puts the finishing touch to our case !"

"I have not given it up at all," answered Norbert merrily. "I am only trying to sift and understand our opponents' arguments. I don't mind their opposition a bit, for before very long I shall be able to silence them with the *irrefragable* proof drawn from my lunar observations. For the present I am quite satisfied with the confidence of my shareholders, which is very touching under the circumstances."

"How? Do they believe in our journey, then?"

"If they didn't, I should no longer be able to term them my share-

holders!" answered Norbert, laughing; "but as they gave their money to forward our experiment, they are quite willing to accept the latter in its entirety, such as it was. They have, moreover, formally congratulated me, and have unanimously voted funds to reconstitute the original capital, and enable us to resume operations whenever it shall be feasible."

"Well, if you ever go to the moon again, let me be of the party!" cried the doctor. "I really must succeed in proving——"

"Alas!" replied Norbert. "I fear it will not be an easy matter for a long time to come. Besides the fact that it will not be easy to find a mountain as rich in magnetic pyrites as the Peak of Tehbali, I fear it will be still more difficult to come across a country containing in itself all the conditions of success, like the Soudan. It will be long before that land will be open to Europeans again."

And this is just where the great enterprise of the Lunar Company stands at the present time. If ever it is possible to resume operations in the Soudan, the conquest of the Moon may yet become an accomplished fact.

And should that event take place, Norbert Mauny is sure to endeavor to find out what has become of Kaddour and the unfortunate prisoners who were left behind when the adventurers returned to Mother Earth.

A. Laurie.

THE END.

"AS YOU LIKE IT."

Two drooping eyes,
Two pouting lips;
Two angry teeth
Bite finger tips.
Two ruddy cheeks
Flush more and more;
Two dainty feet
Chastise the floor,
The maid is mad.

Two merry eyes,
Two laughing lips;
Two rows of pearls
Touch finger tips.
Two cheeks aglow
With love galore,
Two fairy feet
Trip o'er the floor.
The maid is glad.

John B. Taylor.